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Fabian Socialism and the Struggle for Independent Labour Representation: 1884-1900

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Abstract

This thesis is a study on Fabian attitudes towards the struggle for independent labour representation during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The Fabian Society has often claimed it greatly influenced the struggle to establish a working-class political party prior to the inauguration of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) in 1900. Yet, many of the Fabians' contemporaries disagreed. This thesis challenges any assertion that the Fabian Society greatly influenced the LRC. Through a study of the Fabian Society's early history, beliefs and attitudes it is clear that the Fabians were more likely to be very negative towards any rank and file movements. The Fabians had little faith in the "average sensual man". Even their Manifesto "To Your Tents Oh Israel" cannot, in the final analysis, be viewed as concrete proof that the Fabian Society placed great hope in the working man and in his struggle for labour representation.

Résumé

Dans cette thèse, nous étudions la position des membres de la Société Fabian au cours des deux dernières décennies du dix-neuvième siècle quant à une représentation politique indépendante des ouvriers. La Société Fabian a souvent prétendu qu'elle avait eu une grande influence sur l'effort de création d'un parti politique ouvrier avant l'inauguration du *Labour Representation Committee* (LRC) en 1900. Et pourtant, bon nombre des contemporains disent le contraire. Notre thèse conteste l'affirmation selon laquelle la Société Fabian aurait eu une influence significative sur le LRC. A travers l'analyse de l'histoire de la Société Fabian, de sa philosophie et de ses attitudes, nous constatons que cette société à ses débuts voyait d'un mauvais oeil tout mouvement populaire. Les Fabians n'avaient que peu de confiance en 'l'homme sensuel moyen'; même leur manifeste 'A vos tentes, oh Israël' ne peut être considéré en fin de compte comme une preuve concrète d'une confiance quelconque dans les ouvriers et dans leurs efforts vers une représentation politique.

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And finally thanks to Mom, Caroline, Velda and Bobbie Jo.

This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother who could not attend school as much as she wished but who always encouraged me in my studies.

Table of Contents

Chapter One:

Introduction

Margaret Cole, undoubtedly in a somewhat hyperbolic fashion, once stated, that the simple act of designating any event, object, or thought as "Fabian" could provoke "many an honest socialist and trade unionist to writhe and foam at the mouth".[1] Historian Francis Lee, likewise, notes that the term "Fabianism" has frequently been employed as a "term of abuse".[2] Right from their foundation in 1884 the Fabians were often derisively regarded as "fops and armchair socialists".[3] In short, they were often viewed as socialists who actually feared and divorced themselves from the working classes: in some instances they were viewed as socialists who preferred the company of politicians; in other instances, they were viewed as socialists who were more often in the drawing rooms of the ruling classes than in the factories and sweatshops of the working classes. Consequently, the Fabians were often regarded as deficient when it came to understanding the feelings or aspirations of the working classes.[4]

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[1] Margaret Cole. The Story of Fabian Socialism, (London: Mercury Book, 1961), p. 94.

[2] Francis Lee, Fabianism and Colonialism: the Life and Political Thought of Lord Sydney Olivier, (London: Defiant Books, 1988), p. 15. Sydney Olivier (1859-1943) was a founding member of the Fabian Society.

[3] G.B. Shaw, Fabian Tract 41, " The Fabian Society: Its Early History", (London: Fabian Society, 1892), p. 11.

[4] For instance see the comments of "Social Democrat" in the Workman's Times, on 9 September, 1893. "Social Democrat" considered the Fabians to be autocratic and egotistical. He wrote that the Fabians "believe in the necessity of regenerating society, but they are the accepted regenerators" owing to their "intellectual and social superiority". Friedrich Engels referred

This thesis is an attempt to analyze Fabian attitudes towards the working classes in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, particularly as they relate to the struggle for indepedent labour representation, which led to the development of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) in 1900.[5] This is a fertile area of conflict. For while there is little debate on the Fabians' contribution to the Labour Party following 1918, when Sidney Webb essentially wrote its constitution,[6] a heavy debate does exist on the extent of the Fabians' contribution to independent labour representation prior to and including the 1900 founding of the LRC. The Fabians themselves were wont to claim they strongly laid the groundwork

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to the Fabians as a "clique of bourgeois Socialists" united only by their fear of the workers. See Engels to Karl Kautsky, 4 September, 1892, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels on Britain, 2nd ed.(Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), p. 576. Leon Trotsky also depicted Fabianism as "perhaps the most useless and in any case the most boring form of verbal creation". Trotsky, Where is Britain Going? (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1926), p. 74. As recent scholars have observed Fabianism has often been wrongly "miscast or dismissed as politically unimportant". See Duncan Tanner in E.F. Biagini and Alastair J. Reid, eds., Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organized Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850-1914, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 271-291.

[5] The LRC was founded on Tuesday, 27 February, 1900, in a two day meeting held in Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, London, in accordance with a resolution of the Trades Union Congress held at Plymouth in September, 1899. For additional information see Report of Proceeding of the Thirty Second Annual Trades Union Congress, (London: Co-Operative Printing Society, 1899).

[6] For an example of Fabian influence on the later Labour Party it is interesting to note that of the 394 Labour Party members elected to Parliament in 1945, 229 were members of the Fabian Society. See B. E. Nolan, The Political Theory of Beatrice Webb, (New York: Ams Press, Inc., 1988), p. 20.

for the founding of the LRC, and by extension the Labour Party. Fabian contemporaries and many later historians have been equally quick to disagree. For example, Sidney Webb claimed that from 1887 onward the Fabian Society had "looked to the formation of a strong and independent labour party, which should take over the banner of social and economic reform from the Liberal Party".[7] Yet, many of the Fabians' contemporaries, fellow socialists and labour enthusiasts, such as "Autolycus", held that the "movement in favour of Independent Labour representation" owed "nothing to the Fabian Society".[8] It is the intent of this paper to judge which of the above statements most adequately depicts the Fabians' activities in the area of the labour movement in the 1880s and 1890s.

In order to do so, four factors must be taken into account. Firstly, one must understand the nature of the people involved in the Fabian Society and the type of movement they constituted. Chapter two of this thesis will, therefore, attempt to provide an account of the foundation and social composition of the early Fabian Society. It will also attempt to address the many myths that existed about the early Fabian Society. Secondly, an attempt to fathom their beliefs is essential. Thus, chapter three will

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[7] Sidney Webb, St. Martin's Review, February, 1929, as quoted in Mary Agnes Hamilton, Sidney and Beatrice Webb: A Study in Contemporary Biography, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1933), p. 31.

[8] Workman's Times, 25 November, 1893, p. 1. "Autolycus" was a pseudonym for John Burgess, a former mill hand who became the editor of the Workman's Times.

examine the Fabian Society's beliefs, stressing the centrality of collectivism and permeation to their theory of society. Thirdly, Fabian attitudes towards the working class must be studied, and finally the Fabian Manifesto "To Your Tents Oh Israel" must be examined.

"To Your Tents Oh Israel" was a manifesto submitted to the Fortnightly Review for publication on 1 November, 1893. A year later the Fabian Society reproduced and expanded "To Your Tents Oh Israel" into Fabian Tract 49: "A Plan for the Campaign of Labour".[9] Both "To Your Tents Oh Israel" and Tract 49 seemed to promote the idea of establishing a parliamentary labour party independent of any other political parties.[10] As such, both the Manifesto and Tract 49 have been upheld by members of the Fabian Society as concrete proof that the Labour Party was both predicted and primarily moulded by the Fabian mind-set. As E.R. Pease stated:

> the Society, in whose name the Manifesto appeared, called on the working classes to abandon Liberalism, to form a Trade Union party of their own, to raise thirty thousand pounds and to finance fifty candidates for Parliament. It is a curious coincidence that thirteen years later, in 1906, the Party [was] formed, as the Manifesto demanded...the big Trade Unions actually financed precisely fifty candidates and succeeded in electing thirty of them.[11]

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[9] G.B. Shaw, Fabian Tract 49, "A Plan for the Campaign of Labour", (London: Fabian Society, 1894).

[10] Fabian Society,"To Your Tents Oh Israel", Fortnightly Review, Vol. 54, (November, 1893), pp. 569-589.

[11] E.R. Pease, The History of the Fabian Society, (London: A.C. Fifield, 1926), first published 1916, p. 116.

As this thesis will make clear, however, despite the existence of the Fabians' Manifesto, they were never enthusiastically in support of the movement and men that founded the LRC. In fact, the Fabians' lack of interest in the founding of the LRC and the LRC leaders' lack of enthusiasm for the Fabian Society's guidance is well documented. For example, while Keir Hardie's Labour Leader was characterizing the proceedings of the newly christened LRC conference as "a distinct development in the Labour movement", a development that was "universally recognized as the beginning of a new era",[12] Fabians such as Sidney and Beatrice Webb, if their letters or diary are any indication, remained unmoved by the inauguration of the LRC. As the editors of Beatrice Webb's diaries remarked, Beatrice was most likely to write in her diary when she was "excited" or "depressed" about a topic. Apparently the establishment of the LRC was not important enough to warrant either emotion.[13]

The Fabians' reaction, or lack thereof, to the inception of the nascent Labour Party was consistent with Fabian behaviour prior to the founding of the LRC and is a direct reflection of the Fabians' contempt for the abilities of the working classes. This paper will argue that any assertion claiming that the London

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[12] Keir Hardie in Labour Leader, 10 March, 1900, p.76. For an overview of Hardie's paper the Labour Leader, see Fred Reid's chapter on "Keir Hardie and the Labour Leader, 1893-1903" in Jay Winter, ed., The Working Class In Modern British History, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 19-42.

[13] Beatrice Webb, The Diary of Beatrice Webb, vol. II, 1892-1905, edited by Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1983), p. xi.

Fabian Society and its leaders were essential to the formation of the LRC is an assumption based largely on false myths, and on a misunderstanding of the Fabians' view on independent labour representation. The Fabian Society never believed the working classes of Britain could initiate and maintain a Labour Party, led and supported by the workers of Britain.

The question remains: can we use a study on Fabian attitudes towards the working class to gain a better understanding on the Fabians' motivation for writing the Manifesto? More importantly, by grasping a truer picture of the Fabian Society and their opinions on the potential of the working classes to act politically, can we use this to understand why the Manifesto was not warmly received by Fabian contemporaries and must be judged a political failure? This thesis believes we can. Indeed, it is through a better understanding of the Fabians' opinions on the working classes, prior to and after the Manifesto, that we may begin to comprehend why the Fabian Manifesto may not be taken as a concrete example of the Fabian Society shaping and predicting the future Labour Party. As will be explained in Chapter five, the Manifesto was written for many reasons: but not once did someone believe that the Manifesto was written because the Fabian Society suddenly believed the working classes were capable of sustained and independent political action. Moreover, the Labour Party that was established was not the one envisioned by the Fabian Society. As Henry Pelling states, the Labour Party, in "its complete freedom from commitment to ideas or programme...was

truly representative of the working class of its day".[14] The Fabians in fact criticized the Labour Party for its lack of commitment to the ideas and programme of Socialism.[15] The fact that it reflected the working classes did not immediately justify it in the eyes of the Fabian Society. The Fabian Society did not view the working classes as being intellectually mature enough to be the instrument through which social change would come about.

It should be noted here that this paper will present the Fabian Society as reflective of a small group of middle class adherents, notably exiled from the majority of the middle class. Consisting mainly of professionals, the Fabians, perhaps because of their social composition and how they earned a living, understandably based many of their concepts on notions of meritocracy and the growth of the expert. They did not adhere to notions of the class struggle and had no need to rely on a specific mass movement of workers to ensure the future for socialism. They preferred to work through the existing parties. As Albert Fried and Ronald Sanders stated, far from "exalting" the worker, the Fabian Society would have "preferred a uniformly middle class society".[16] The notion that the Fabian Manifesto, "To Your Tents Oh Israel" indicated support for a policy of independent labour representation and, indeed, Asa Briggs' notion

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[14] Henry Pelling, Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968), p. 15.

[15] Pease, History, p. 151.

[16] Albert Fried and Ronald Sanders, eds. Socialist Thought: A Documentary History, (New York: Anchor Books, 1964), p. 390.

that the Fabians in fact "tried to attract working class support" will be highly questioned.[17] In addition, while there is no doubt that Fabianism was a heterogeneous movement, this thesis will also specifically focus on "orthodox" or classical Fabianism, that is the most prominent strain of Fabianism which was essentially associated with the Webbs and Shaw.[18]

One final point: Fabian writings have all been examined before; there are no obvious gaps in historical knowledge to be illuminated for the first time by new research. But it is important to understand Fabian attitudes towards the working classes and the struggle for independent labour representation for at least three main reasons. First of all, the history of the Labour Party itself has been so "tangled" with the discussions of Fabian activities, that studying Fabianism may be seen as an

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[17] Stated by Asa Briggs, in Fabian Essays in Socialism, (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1962), p. 27.

[18] While historians have noted the heterogeneity of Fabianism (see Ian Britain, Fabianism and Culture: A Study in British Socialism and the Arts,(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 271, and E.J. Hobsbawm's chapter "The Lesser Fabians" in L.M. Munby, ed. The Luddites and Other Essays, (London: Michael Katanka Book Ltd., 1971), p. 231 ff.) there is also a consensus of opinion that Shaw and Webb dominated the Society. Hobsbawm speaks of the "absorption" of the Fabian Society by Sidney Webb. Neil Mackenzie writes that Shaw and the Webbs dominated the Society and ran it much like a family business. See N. Mackenzie, ed., The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Partnership, 1892-1912, vol II, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. x. Even Francis Lee, who believes Fabianism subsumed many divergent views, notes that the current of thought, represented by Shaw and the Webbs, "became dominant in the Fabian Society during the late 19th century, to the extent that an official, mainstream or orthodox Fabianism was created". See Lee, Fabianism, p. 15.

"essential and illuminating part of Labour history".[19] Secondly, as James D. Young notes it is "certainly true that the peculiarity of the socialist intelligentsia in England shaped the subsequent perceptions in Labour historians' chronicles of working class life".[20] Thirdly, as Margaret Cole points out, the 1890s is an important epoch in the history of the Fabian Society itself because "it conditioned the opinion formed of the Society in Labour circles for a long time to come".[21] Grasping a better understanding of why the Fabians failed to overtly support the struggle for independent labour representation in the 1880s and 1890s is the focus of this thesis.

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[19] E.J. Hobsbawm, reviews "M.I. Cole: The Story of Fabian Socialism", The Society for the Study of Labour History, Vol. 4, (Spring, 1962), p. 60.

[20] James D. Young, Socialism and the English Working Class, (Worcester: Billing and Sons, 1989), p. 8.

[21] Cole, The Story, p. 89.

Chapter Two

The Background

The Fabian Society was founded on Friday, 4 January 1884, in the small apartment of twenty-six year old Edward R. Pease, at 17 Osnaburgh Street, London.[1] Its founding members were originally all adherents of a contemplative London based group, the Fellowship of the New Life. The Fabians had split with the Fellowship fundamentally over the question of how properly to seek a regeneration of humanity. The Fellowship of the New Life, led by the Scottish scholar Thomas Davidson (1840-1900), aspired to improve humanity through the "cultivation of a perfect character in each and all". The Fellowship believed in the "subordination of material things to the spiritual". They sought to achieve individual perfection through focusing on the individual and perhaps through communal living.[2]

The persons predisposed to found the Fabian Society, on the other hand, tended to believe that the best path to "human regeneration" lay in hard thinking combined with an active attempt to help "reconstruct" society through practical material steps. That is to say, the early Society aimed to reconstruct Britain's industrial and political institutions by gradually

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[1] Joseph Clayton, The Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain, 1884-1924, (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1926), pp. 40-41. Clayton listed the founding members of the Fabian Society. They included E.R.Pease, H.H.Champion, Havelock Ellis, J.L. Joynes, Hubert Bland, Hunter Watts, William Clarke and Frank Podmore.

[2] Pease, History, p. 32. The Fellowship of the New Life was founded in 1883 and lasted until 1898. It published the quarterly Seed Time, and boasted such members as Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter. For further information into the beliefs of the movement see T. Davidson, The Positive Virtues: A Lecture Read Before the Fellowship of the New Life, New York, (Chicago: The Open Court Pub. Co., 1887).

appropriating unearned industrial capital and land from the individual and investing them in the community at large.[3] Subsequently, the Fabians' motto and indeed their very name, suggested by Frank Podmore, reflected the tactics of a third century B.C. Roman general Quintus Fabius Cunctator. The Fabian motto became:

> For the right moment you must wait, as Fabius did most patiently, when warring against Hannibal, though many censure his delays; but when the time comes you must strike hard, as Fabius did, or your waiting will be in vain and fruitless.[4]

By most contemporary accounts, the early Fabian Society consisted of a mixture of people with divergent views. As John Rae stated in his 1891 work Contemporary Socialism, the early Fabian Society was a "debating club" containing "socialists of all feathers" which met "together...and exchanged their views, without having any recognized end beyond discussion".[5] Shaw, who joined the Society in the autumn of 1884, correspondingly depicted the early Fabian Society as

a silly business. They had one elderly retired

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[3] See the "Basis of the Fabian Society", in Fabian Tracts, Nos. 1-139, (London: Fabian Society, 1884 to 1908) , located between Tract 41 and Tract 42. The Basis was essentially the Fabian's constitution. Established in 1887 it remained unchanged until 1919. It contained statements to the effect that "The Fabian Society consists of Socialists...The Society accordingly works for the extinction of private property in Land ...For the attainment of these ends the Fabian Society looks to the spread of Socialist opinion".

[4] Robert Archey Wood, English Social Movements, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), p. 57.

[5] John Rae, Contemporary Socialism, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), p. 88.

> workman. They had two psychical researchers: Edward Pease and Frank Podmore...There were anarchists, led by Mrs. Wilson, who would not hear of anything Parliamentary...There were atheists and Anglo- Catholics...[6]

The term "socialism" itself did not enter Fabian documentation until its sixth meeting on 21 March, 1884,[7] and Sidney Webb, the man (in conjunction with Shaw) most typically associated with the socialism of the Fabian Society, did not join the movement until 20 March, 1885.[8] As E.R. Pease stated, the Fabian Society had "with considerable courage set out to reconstruct society, and we frankly confessed that we did not know how to go about it".[9] In fact, a distinctly Fabian view developed only slowly over the course of the 1880s. This has led some writers, for example R.H.S. Crossman, and some founding Fabians, such as E.R. Pease and William Clarke, to state that it was not until the publication of Fabian Essays in Socialism that the first mature and coherent expression of Fabian theory advocating a peaceful, gradual, collectivist reform of British institutions appeared.

The Fabian Essays in Socialism, consisting originally of a series of lectures given in the autumn of 1888 by G.B. Shaw,

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[6] Shaw cited in Margaret Cole, The Webbs and Their Work, (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1974), p. 7.

[7] Pease, History, p. 37.

[8] A. Fried and R. Sanders, eds. Socialist Thought, p. 389. Fried and Sanders described Shaw and Webb as the "most famous apostles of Fabian Socialism".

[9] Pease, History, p. 40.

Sidney Webb, Graham Wallas, Sydney Olivier, William Clarke, Annie Besant, and Hubert Bland, was printed and published privately by the Fabian Society in 1889.[10] R.H.S. Crossman described the Fabian Essays as the "first clear statement of the philosophy of gradualism".[11] Pease stated that its publication presented socialism in a language "everyone could understand", a socialism based not on Marxism but on the "obvious evolution of society as we see it around us".[12] Clarke believed the book "gave to the Fabian Society a national instead of a merely local reputation".[13] With this book the Fabians clearly established a pattern for their socialistic involvement in society and clearly began to attract a certain type of person.

By all accounts, the early Fabian Society consisted almost exclusively of young, middle-class intellectuals with a "merely token" working-class following.[14] Members of the Fabian Society,

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[10] Pease, History, p. 88. The Fabian Essays in Socialism was printed by the Fabians because they could not get it published in a "fair house". It sold rapidly at six shillings per copy. In fact, within two years of publication, over 26000 copies were sold. See D.E. Nord, The Apprenticeship of Beatrice Webb, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), p. 206.

[11] R.H.S. Crossman, ed. New Fabian Essays, (London: Turnstile Press, 1952), p. vii.

[12] Pease, History, p. 90.

[13] G.B. Shaw, ed. Fabian Essays in Socialism, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, Jubilee Edition, 1948), first published in 1889, p. xxxi.

[14] Britain, Fabianism, p. 7. Indeed, Annie Besant who joined in 1885 appeared to have been one of the eldest among the leading Fabians at the age of thirty eight, and Shaw claimed "there was not 5 years difference between the oldest and the youngest". See Clayton, The Rise, p. 42.

who for the most part had been radicals or adherents to the "extreme democratic wing of the Liberal Party", were typically composed of two sections of the middle class.[15] The first section included members of the "traditional" middle class who had developed a "social conscience" or a pronounced distaste for the inequalities of society.[16] The second section consisted of the new salaried, professional, administrative, and technological representatives of British society.[17]

These two sectors of the Fabian Society represented what many historians designate an "alienated" section of the middle class, what Hobsbawm terms the "nouvelle couche sociale".[18] For example, Willard Wolfe maintains that the early Fabian Society consisted of "convinced Free thinkers" alienated from "conventional" religious belief by the "new scientific and historical outlook of their time".[19] Historian Stanley Pierson similarly depicts the early Fabian members as individuals who had "suffered in varying degrees from a sense of social dislocation

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[15] McBriar, Fabian Socialism, p. 71. The notable exception being Hubert Bland, a Tory by origin.

[16] E.J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour, (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1964), p. 256. In fact, middle class women composed more than a quarter of the total membership in 1890.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., p. 258.

[19] Willard Wolfe, From Radicalism to Socialism: Men and Ideas in the Formation of Fabian Socialist Doctrines, 1881-1889, (London: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 151.

and religious uncertainty".[20]

Thus, most Fabians were not workers agitating because they were dissatisfied with their lot in life. Most Fabians were intellectual, disgruntled, salaried professionals disillusioned by the society in which they lived. Approximately ten percent of the Society's male membership in 1892 consisted of writers and journalists,[21] such as Hubert Bland and G. B. Shaw. Many others were clerks or higher civil servants, such as Sydney Olivier and Sidney Webb, or teachers, such as Graham Wallas. Most Fabians were well educated, ranging from autodidacts such as Shaw, to graduates of Cambridge or Oxford like Frank Podmore and Graham Wallas. Membership lists indicate only one worker, a retired house painter, W.L. Phillips, being present shortly after the Society's founding.[22]

In an article entitled, "The Fabians Reconsidered", Hobsbawm attempts to trace the occupations of a number of Fabians between 1890 and 1907, in order to study the Society's social composition. Hobsbawm's study calculates that in 1890 the number of workers in the Fabian Society totalled approximately 9,

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[20] Stanley Pierson, Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism: the Struggle for London, 1885-1914, (London: Cornell University Press, 1973), p. 106. As Clive E. Hill states, the origins of the Fabian Society must be situated within "a crisis of faith: which involved a realignment of their beliefs in the light of Britain's economic decline, as well as the Darwinian controversy and the general secularization of society". See, Hill, Understanding, p. 12.

[21] Hobsbawm, Labouring Men, p. 250.

[22] Ibid.

whereas the number of middle-class Fabian adherents numbered about 116. In 1892 the Society contained 54 workers and 314 middle class members. By 1904 the number of workers in the Fabian Society had decreased to 34, while the number of middle class adherents had increased to 334.[23] Thus, the early Fabian Society was predominantly middle class and displayed a curious lack of working class members.

This Fabian tendency to be overwhelmingly middle class may seem peculiar. The Fabian Basis explicitly stated that the Fabians sought "recruits from all ranks" of society. The Fabian Society, denying any notions of class war, stressed the belief that not only "those who suffer from the present system", but also "many who are themselves enriched" by the system, wished to change society, therefore the enlightened members of all classes should be permitted to join the Fabian Society.[24] Yet, as A.M. McBriar notes, the bulk of the Fabian Society's propaganda was actually directed at cultivating members not from the working classes, but from the "professional and administrative classes", from those who in a material sense were not suffering from

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[23] Ibid., pp. 268, 269. In June of 1886 the Fabian Society consisted of 87 members. See Pease, History, p. 60. In 1890 there were 173 members. By 1892 membership had grown to 541, peaking in 1893 at 640 members. See, A. Fried and R. Sanders, eds. Socialist Thought, p. 391.

[24] "Basis of the Fabian Society" as cited in Fabian Tracts, located between Tract 41 and Tract 42. Any person seeking membership to the Fabian Society had to have two sponsors and swear adherence to the Fabian Basis.

society's ills.[25] Samuel Hynes explicitly underlines a similar notion to McBriar's in his work The Edwardian Turn of Mind. To Hynes, the Fabians thought of themselves as "scientific socialists", as an "elite", who made membership to their ranks complicated and difficult. Fabians were not interested in making their Society more representative of the community at large, i.e. representative of the worker.[26] They were more interested in cultivating the interests of what Beatrice Webb labelled the "B's" of society, the "bourgeois, bureaucratic, or benevolent".[27]

G.B. Shaw confirmed the early Fabian tendency to disregard the worker and instead to cultivate the middle class for their Society. During a discussion on the early history of the Fabian establishment, he declared that the most "apparent reason" the Fabians decided to form their own socialist association in 1884, rather than join the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), or the Socialist League, was obviously because Fabians "were then middle-class all through, rank and file as well as leaders, whereas the League and Federation were quite proletarian in their rank and file".[28] Perhaps, in keeping with this line of thought, Henry Pelling perceives that "the principal characteristic" of

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[25] McBriar, Fabian Socialism, p. 185.

[26] Samuel Hynes, The Edwardian Turn of Mind, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 90.

[27] Cole, Webbs and Their Work, p. 126.

[28] G.B. Shaw, Fabian Tract 41, "The Fabian Society: What it Has Done and How it Has Done It", (London: The Fabian Society, 1892), p. 4.

the early Fabian leaders was a discernable desire to "escape occasionally from the street corner atmosphere of the Federation" and retreat to the quiet drawing rooms of its members.[29]

Shaw conceded that by insistently holding their "meetings in one another's drawing rooms" the Fabian Society "undoubtedly prevented working men from joining the Fabian".[30] He did not appear overly concerned by this. With statements to the effect that "we knew that we could collaborate at full speed solely with our own class and not with casual artisans and labourers with a different mental background and rooted class prejudice against us",[31] Shaw did not seem to lay too much importance on class collaboration. He obviously felt the need to shield his Society against what he termed "the absurdity of Socialists" who attacked the Fabian Society for its overriding middle-class composition. According to Shaw, socialism had sprung especially from the middle class and the Fabian Society could not "reasonably" utilize the words "bourgeois" or "middle class" in a derogatory sense because it would "thereby condemn a large portion of its own members".[32]

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[29] Henry Pelling, The Origins of the Labour Party, 1880-1900, (London: MacMillan, 1954), p. 36.

[30] G.B. Shaw, Fabian Tract 41, "The Fabian Society: What it Has Done and How it Has Done It", (London: Fabian Society, 1892), p. 4.

[31] Cole, Webbs and Their Work, p. 7.

[32] G.B. Shaw, Fabian Tract 70, "Report of Fabian Policy and Resolutions" (London: The Fabian Society, 1896), p. 7. Shaw in 1947, at the age of 90 was again to write that, "We Fabians were a middle class lot; and when a proletarian joined us he could not

The fact that Fabian Society principally consisted of middle-class adherents has led some historians to comment that though the Fabian movement was, as a whole, a heterogeneous movement, its social composition was homogeneous. The possible effects this homogeneity may have had on the Fabian-mind set has led historians to various conclusions. Ian Britain, for instance, believes this middle-class homogeneity provided the Fabian Society with a common, stable basis which made it flexible enough to contain persons of diverse marginal views without suffering radical breakups.[33] Therefore in one sense it was a strength. As Margaret Cole in Makers of the Labour Movement states "their effectiveness was increased by their social homogeneity". She believes that this was an important fact sometimes overlooked by historians.[34] Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol proposes that though the heterogeneity of the movement made it hard to locate a consistent Fabian ideology, especially in the first decades of its existence, the middle class social homogeneity of

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work mentally at the same speed and in the same way against the same cultural background as we. He was therefore an obstruction to our work, and finally abandoned us with his class mistrust of us intensified...As our relations were quite friendly as long as we worked in separate compartments we learnt that cultural segregation is essential in research and indiscriminate fraternization fatal. Rudimentary unskilled Socialism has no place in the Fabian Society." See the 1962 edition of Fabian Essays in Socialism, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1962), p. 314.

[33] Britain, Fabianism, p. 20.

[34] Margaret Cole, Makers of the Labour Movement, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1948), p. 234.

the movement allows one to posit that Fabian "values" and "attitudes" still very much reflected the middle class they arose from. They cite the work of Karl Mannheim which states that "nothing could be more wrong than to ...maintain that the class and status ties of the individual disappear completely by virtue of belonging to the intelligentsia".[35] Indeed, Paul Thompson claims that one result of the early Fabian Society being almost completely middle class or non proletarian, was that it consequently was "frightened of the idea of the class struggle" and hence denied the working class the opportunity to be the leading, responsible agent for societal changes.[36] Thus, Thompson sees the homogeneous nature of the Fabians as a weakness.

Societal change was important to the Fabian Society, and they believed that there was a proper set of steps which could improve the social investigators' study of society's problems. The Fabian Society would firstly observe and collect all the relevant facts, in a disinterested manner, on a given topic. They would then discuss the evidence and propose conclusions and solutions. Finally, they would publish their findings in an

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[35] D. Rueschemeyer, and T. Skocpol, States, Social Knowledge and the Origins of Modern Social Policies, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 129, 126. See also Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia, (San Diego: Harcourt, Bruce, Jovanovich, 1985), p. 155.

[36] Paul Thompson, Socialists, Liberals and Labour: The Struggle for London, 1885-1914 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 138.

attempt to educate the public.[37] It is no wonder Beatrice Webb depicted the early Fabian Society as "analytical", "historical" , and "explanatory".[38]

Fabians themselves often viewed their evolution through three historical stages. In the first stage, or their "self forming stage", the Fabians entertained discussions solely among themselves. They taught themselves rather than others. In their second stage, the "educational stage", Fabians began to branch out and to teach others, much as if they were apostles. In their third stage, Fabians entered the realm of politics, although as Clarke cautioned, education remained the "main objective of the Society" with the "need" for study being "insisted on".[39]

It is this early history of the Fabian Society, with these three stages of evolution, that later historians, such as Hobsbawm, Paul Thompson and Philip Poirier, claim was replete with myths, myths especially perpetuated by Fabians and carried on by later historians. These myths give the impression that a profound Fabian influence existed over British Society, prior to World War One. The Fabians, as Hobsbawm states, "never required others to blow their own trumpet".[40] The Fabians were their own public relations office. They did not have to rely on others to

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[37] "Basis of the Fabian Society" as cited in Fabian Tracts, located between Tract 41 and Tract 42.

[38] Britain, Fabianism, p. 4.

[39] William Clarke, "The Fabian Society", New England Magazine, vol. 10, (1894), pp. 92, 94.

[40] Hobsbawm, Labouring Men, p. 250.

provide press releases for them. They could do that for themselves. For instance, after the arrival of the Labour Party in British politics the Fabians' "trumpet blowing", according to historians such as Hobsbawm, McBriar and Poirier, took the form of Fabians insisting that they had always predicted the development of the Labour Party.

This largely positive view became popular in a number of books on Fabian history, and has since been attributed to the obvious certainty that much of the Fabian Society's history was, in fact, written by Fabians. E.R. Pease, for example, who penned the first official history of the Fabian Society in 1916, had served as the Fabians' General Secretary and Honorary Secretary from 1890 to 1919. Thus, Pease's History of the Fabian Society, perhaps not so surprisingly, staked a number of claims historians have since designated as highly unlikely or "largely mythological".[41] For instance, Pease's work maintained that the Fabian Society broke "the spell of Marxism in England", that the Fabian Society provided "freedom of thought...for English Socialists", and that, most important for this paper, the Fabian Society actively participated in the struggle for independent labour representation that directly inspired the British Labour Party.[42]

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[41] Ibid., p. 251. As Beatrice Webb stated, the "Fabians at any rate write history if they do not make it!" See B.Webb, Our Partnership, edited by B. Drake and M.I. Cole, (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1948), p. 134.

[42] Pease, History, pp. 236, 237.

According to Thompson, the Fabians' claim to have provided the impetus that motivated the British Labour Party, was a Fabian fabrication that truly represented one aspect of what he termed the Fabians' "legend of political achievements". The Fabian Society, in Thompson's opinion, invented a false "legend of political achievements", a hierarchy of myths, in order to deny the claim that they were merely political opportunists.[43] As early as 1893 a sense that the Fabians were unjustly claiming an influence on the labour movement they did not in fact possess permeated the statement of "Autolycus". "Autoclyus", a pseudonym for John Burgess, wrote, "the Fabian is constantly on the prowl, poking with his pen knife at every popular movement, contented if he can scratch the initials of the Fabian Society on its surface".[44] Fabians claiming to have inspired the Labour Party were, to Thompson, part of a "full fantasy" based largely on the "openly lying" statements of George Bernard Shaw.

George Bernard Shaw was typically accorded most of the responsibility for endeavouring to instill a false and lasting impression that the Fabian Society was in a major sense responsible for the development of the Labour Party in the 1900s. Thompson states that Shaw's was a "devastating example" of the

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[43] Thompson, Socialists, p. 141.

[44] Workman's Times, 28 November, 1893, p. 1. An earlier expression of discontent with the Fabians' tendency to over exaggerate their influence appeared in the Workman's Times, on 31 December, 1892, p. 1. Benjamin Gardiner, an unskilled labourer, wrote, "If I ridiculed Sindey Webb and others, it was because Shaw modestly claimed that he and Webb had metamorphosed the face of the English political earth".

"historical fraudulence" that could be "purveyed by scintillating rhetoric".[45] A.M. McBriar credits Shaw "in his more extravagant moments" of giving "an impression of the Society, or more particularly of Sidney Webb, as the real manipulator of the thinking of the Labour movement".[46] Shaw apparently reinforced this posture with statements such as, "Have you ever noticed that one result of the Fabians constantly telling the world how clever they are is that the world is beginning to believe them?"[47]

Indeed some later historians did believe that the Fabian Society greatly influenced the labour movement in Britain prior to World War One. For example, R.H. Tawney in 1923 stated that the "Labour movement" was made possible "more than anything else" by the Fabians Sidney and Beatrice Webb.[48] Willard Wolfe claims that the "early leaders of the Fabian Society and their theory ...became the dominant theory of the Labour Party".[49] But, perhaps, one of the most excessive statements upholding the view that the Fabian Society was the chief provider of the Labour Party's policies prior to World War One was supplied by G.D.H.

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[45] Thompson, Socialists, p. 141.

[46] McBriar, Fabian Socialism, p. 346.

[47] G.B. Shaw in a letter to W.P.Johnson, 13 February, 1893. as found in G.B. Shaw, Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters, 1874-1897, vol. 1, edited by Dan H. Laurence, (London: Max Reinhardt, 1965). W.P. Johnson was the Secretary of the National Union of Shop Assistants, and an ILP delegate from Manchester at the Bradford Conference in 1893.

[48] R.H. Tawney, "What British Labour Wants", New Republic, vol. 37, (1923), p. 15.

[49] Willard Wolfe, From Radicalism to Socialism, p. 4.

Cole in The World of Labour. Cole stated:

> The first leaders of the Fabian Society, and in particular Mr and Mrs Sidney Webb, were able so completely, through the Independent Labour Party, to impose their conception of society on the Labour Movement that it seemed unnecessary for anyone to do any further thinking... The progress of Labour was beautifully resolved into the gradual evolution of a harmony divinely pre-established by the Fabian Society in the early nineties.[50]

Later historians, notably Paul Thompson, A.M. McBriar and E.J. Hobsbawm, disagree. Thompson believes the Fabians "proved" a "serious obstruction" to those who put their faith in the formation of an independent labour party.[51] McBriar asserts that the Fabians did not immediately accept the Labour Party as the "appointed instrument for bringing about Socialism in Britain". He is of the opinion that the LRC was brought into existence more through the efforts of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) than the Fabians. Indeed, in contrast to Cole's convictions, McBriar's research concludes that the Fabians' influence over the ILP, while admittedly being difficult to measure, seems too inadequate and slight to justify Cole's belief that the Fabians influenced the Labour Party through the ILP. More to the point, McBriar's studies reveal that most Fabians felt that the "time was not ripe" for the Society to support any attempts to form a Labour

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[50] G.D.H. Cole, The World of Labour, (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1913), pp. 2-3.

[51] Thompson, Socialists, Liberals and Labour, p. 149.

Party.[52]

Hobsbawm's notions also run largely counter to Cole's statement. He baldly declares that the Fabian Society was not an "essential part of the socialist and labour movement". The Fabians "actually at most times opposed the foundation of an independent party of the working-class party". In fact, the Fabians were grossly "isolated from the worker".[53] As Stanley Pierson posits, the Fabians substantially "drew back from any active role" in the development of the LRC. The Fabians' failure to participate strongly in the LRC was because, in essence, they "opposed the goal of an independent working-class party".[54]

Indeed, the Fabian Society seemed quite divorced from any notion of becoming an active participant in both the struggle for independent labour representation prior to and including the founding of the LRC. For instance, the "General Correspondence and Political Records of the British Labour Party, 1900-1906", may be searched in vain for strong indications that the Fabians actually believed they should take a leading role in the

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[52] McBriar, Fabian Socialism, p. 345, 235. Historian M. Beer also felt Sidney Webb had "had not appreciated to the full the historic mission of the working class in bringing about socialism".See M. Beer, A History of British Socialism, vol.II, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1921), p. 284.

[53] E.J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men, pp. 266, 255, 253. As Thompson notes, although the Fabians lectured to the radical clubs quite often, only a few Fabians, e.g. Annie Besant and Graham Wallas, actually attempted permeation in working-class organizations. See Thompson, Socialists, p. 149.

[54] Stanley Pierson, British Socialists: the Journey From Fantasy to Politics, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 80.

developing LRC. Instead, a letter by E.R. Pease, to the Secretary of the LRC, Ramsay MacDonald, emphatically stated that the Fabian Society should not take a prominent part in trying to control the policy of the LRC.[55] Moreover, the Fabian Executive, if its minute books are any indication, did not overtly or enthusiastically concern itself with the doings of the LRC.[56] Similarly, the foremost leaders of the nascent Labour Party, men such as Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald, did not appeared eager to accept guidance from the Fabian Society. As one author states, the early leaders of the LRC "did everything possible to restrict the participation of the Fabians in the running of the new born Labour Party".[57]

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[55] General Correspondence and Political Records of the British Labour Party, part 1, 1900-1906, (Sussex: Harvester Press Microfilm Publication, 1978), LRC 3/299, Pease to MacDonald, 6 January 1902. As Pease concluded in his History, the Fabians' attitude towards the LRC was one of "benevolent passivity". Pease, History, p. 51.

[56] See Fabian Society Minute Books, 1884-1918, (Sussex: Harvester Press Ltd, Hassocks microfilm, 1975), 23 February, 1900, 23 March, 1900, 11 May, 1900, 22 June, 1900.

[57] Zygmunt Bauman, Between Class and Elite: The Evolution of the British Labour Movement: A Sociological Study, translated by Sheila Patterson, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960), p. 182. See also, E.Hughes, Keir Hardie, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1956), p. 102 , Lord Elton, The Life of James Ramsay MacDonald, (London: Collins, 1939), p. 97, P. Poirier, The Advent of the British Labour Party, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 29. Poirier states that the Labour leaders were "often sharply critical of the Society, after 1900". They were at odds with the Fabian Society on practically all the political issues of the day. Hence, as Henry Pelling concludes, the "result was a distrust of the Fabians on the part of labour in general which prevented them from resuming the intellectual leadership of the Socialist movement..." See F. Bealey and H. Pelling, eds., Labour and Politics, 1900-1906, (London: MacMillan, 1958), p. 172.

Equally perplexing for the student of Fabian history are the myths perpetuated concerning the nature of the members who made up the Fabian Society, for example the image of Sidney Webb. Webb, once dubbed the "master of Fabian policy", was on the Fabian Executive from 1886 to 1935.[58] He composed nineteen of the first twenty-eight Fabian Tracts. It was said he could read a book as fast as he could turn the pages, and Shaw described him as the "ablest man in England".[59] The conceptualization of Sidney Webb as "an intellectual machine", as a "bloodless intellectual" permeated the history of the Fabian Society. Indeed, so much so that historian Margaret Cole felt it necessary, during an interview with George Bernard Shaw, to ask questions specifically concerning Sidney Webb such as, "Did he seem like a man who had a family ?" , "Did he strike you as having friends, and a life of his own outside his work ?"[60]

Webb's public image was immortalized, one almost wishes to say "institutionalized", in a famous Max Beerbohm cartoon of 1914. Beerbohm's cartoon of Webb was entitled "Mr Sidney Webb on his birthday". In this caricature, Webb, kneeling on the floor, was portrayed "arranging society" by moving toy figurines of people and politicians about as he felt appropriate.[61]

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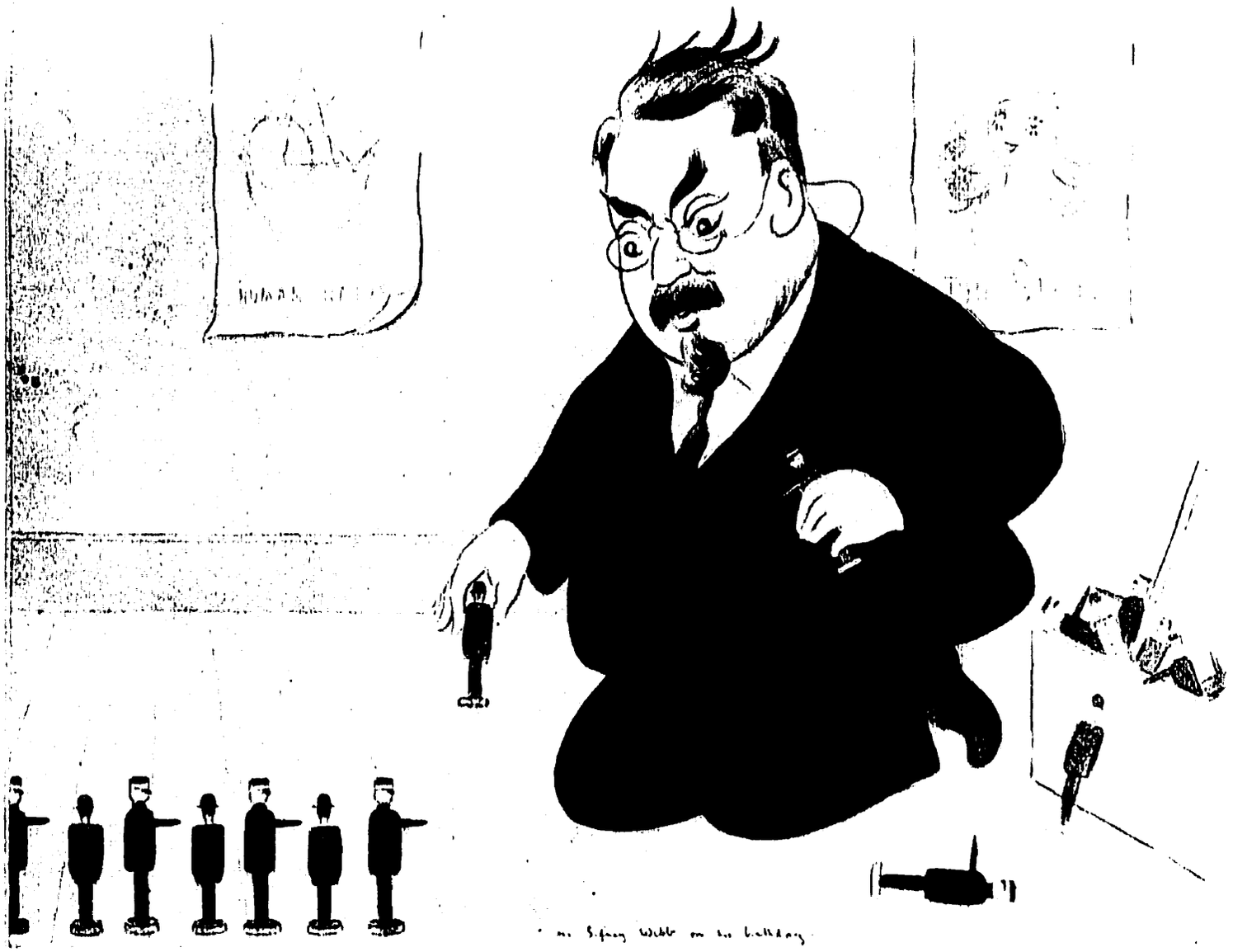
[58] M.M. Sankhdher, Essays on Fabian Socialism, (New Delhi: Deep and Deep, 1991), p. 94.

[59] Cole, Webbs and Their Work, pp. 4, 25.

[60] Cole, Webbs and Their Work, p. 5.

[61] For a reproduction of Beerbohm's caricature see Cole, The Story between pages 208 and 209 or page 29 of this thesis.



William Heinemann Ltd and the Ashmolean

Sidney Webb on his birthday by Max Beerbohm from *A Survey* (1921)

H.G. Wells' fascinating portrayal of the Webbs as Altiora and Oscar Bailey, in his 1910 work The New Machiavelli, similarly depicted Sidney as possessing a "mind as orderly as a museum", as a man who "could do nothing with ideas except remember and discuss them". According to Wells, Sidney and Beatrice Webb craved for society to be "more organized, more correlated with government and a collective purpose". They "believed classes were real, independent of their individuals".[62]

Historian Lisanne Radice believes Wells' characterization of the Webbs "slipped into folk myth and became an uncritically accepted truth".[63] Radice, like Ian Britain, believed corrections had to be made.[64] M.A. Hamilton, an acquaintance of the Webbs would have agreed. Hamilton in her book Remembering My Good Friends, stated that the Webbs had "put over a picture of themselves as detached and emotionless students". This was simply a "disguise" or a "mask" assumed by them because they believed the English were "enthusiasts" who distrusted "enthusiasm". [65]

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[62] H.G. Wells, The New Machiavelli, (London: William Clowes and Sons, Ltd., 1911), pp. 209, 208, 212, 216.

[63] Lisanne Radice, Beatrice and Sidney Webb, (London: MacMillan, 1984), p. 2.

[64] Britain, Fabianism, pp. 272, 226. Britain likewise believes that accepting the myths of the Fabian Society, without comprehensive scrutiny, creates a blanket labelling of Fabianism which encourages a largely negative general prejudice to develop about Fabianism. Consequently, a "deeper inquiry" into the diverse aspects of Fabianism may not occur and thus retard any "historical understanding" of the Fabian movement.

[65] Mary Agnes Hamilton, Remembering My Good Friends, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1944), p. 259.

Hence, the myth of the Webbs, and by extension, the characterization of the early Fabian Society as "bloodless intellectuals" and philistines has to be carefully kept in mind while studying Fabian attitudes towards the working classes.

Chapter Three

Fabian Beliefs

It may seem naive to attempt to explain Fabian attitudes towards the working class when it is common knowledge that the Fabians displayed none of Karl Marx's or William Morris' "faith" in the average working man.[1] Everybody knows the middle class Fabians were elitist.[2] They had little day-to-day contact with the unorganized, labouring poor.[3] Moreover, it is fairly obvious that the Fabian Society never attempted to study the working class divorced from its "institutional affiliations" or stress the importance of the working classes' own culture, as recent writers such as Joanna Bourke and Ross McKibbin have done.[4] Instead, the Fabians often disregarded as unimportant those aspects of working-class culture which did not in some form partake of the organized labour movement, that is the labour

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[1] D.E. Martin and David Rubinstein, eds. Ideology and the Labour Movement: Essays Printed to John Saville, (London: Croom Helm, 1979), p. 53.

[2] Ian Britain defines elites as those persons "seeking to extend to the population at large their own values, tastes and privileges, without really considering how appropriate or how desirable these things may actually be to the majority they are intended to benefit". See Britain, Fabianism, p. 6. In his work Fabianism and Culture, Britain maintains that the Fabians were neither elitist nor philistines. Royden Harrison refutes Britain's opinion in his work "Elitists and Philistines?", The Society for the Study of Labour History, vol. 46, (Spring, 1983), pp. 31-33.

[3] Indeed, H.M. Hyndman believed the Fabian Society was comprised especially of people not prepared to "mix familiarly with the working class". See H.M. Hyndman, The Record of an Adventurous Life, (New York: Macmillan Co., 1911), p. 283.

[4] Joanna Bourke, Working- Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960, (London: Routledge, 1994) and Ross McKibbin, "Why was there no Marxism in Britain?", in The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

movement as it involved trade unions, political parties and workers' clubs. As Clive E. Hill contends, the Fabians were only concerned with the character of the "objective structures" of society. They did not spend a large amount of time mulling over the "subjective experiences and meanings" that individuals attached to these objective structures.[5] Social institutions, not people, interested the Fabian Society. This is ironic, when one considers that the Fabians' "life work was dedicated to the emancipation of the working class", which as David Caute states "is commonly supposed to consist of people".[6]

This failure to appreciate better the organizational power of the working class has permitted historians, such as Caute, to assert that "only facts, statistics and blue prints interested" the Fabians.[7] It has also allowed many Guild socialists to allege that the Fabian Society displayed a "fundamental distrust of ordinary people, and little understanding of their aspirations".[8] The Fabian treated the worker as a passive, somewhat lacking recipient, as an object to be acted upon, rather than as an active participant capable of deriving solutions to his or her own problems. As their contemporary Michael Davitt charged, the Fabian leaders assumed working men and women to "be incapable,

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[5] Clive E. Hill, Understanding, p. 418.

[6] David Caute, The Fellow Travellers: Intellectual Friends of Communism, (London: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 86.

[7] Ibid.

[8] A.W. Wright, G.D.H. Cole and Socialist Democracy, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 55.

intellectually of becoming competent leaders to their own order".[9] An article in an issue of the Workman's Times held a similar opinion. It clearly commented that Bernard Shaw typically treated his audiences as if they "were all asses or ignoramuses".[10] Thus, the opinion that the Fabians exhibited a "contempt for the masses" was well documented by their nineteenth century contemporaries.[11]

Later historians, such as John Callaghan and M.J. Weiner, contend that the "undisguised contempt" the Fabian Society exhibited towards the working classes increased as the nineteenth century drew to a close.[12] As Wiener writes, by the mid-1890s, the "upper echelons of Fabianism" had been tainted by a marked "disillusionment" with that "idol of radicalism", the people.[13] Bernard Shaw himself spoke of the very few English workmen the socialists were able to "save" from the "weltering mass of ignorance...stupidity and selfishness" that they believed were "the people".[14]

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[9] Michael Davitt, "Fabian Fustian", The Nineteenth Century, vol. xxxiv, (December, 1893), p. 885.

[10] Workman's Times, 02 September, 1893, p. 3.

[11] W.H. Greenleaf, The British Political Tradition, vol 2, (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 368.

[12] John Callaghan, Socialism in Britain Since 1884, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 35.

[13] M.J. Wiener, Between Two Worlds: The Political Thought of Graham Wallas, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 37.

[14] Workman's Times, 10 December, 1892, p. 1. See also Fabian Tract 70, p. 13.

The fact that the Fabian Society partook of a contemptuous attitude towards the working class is hardly surprising. Many socialist leaders in mid-nineteenth-century Britain exhibited an "elitism" and "condescension" towards British workers which James D. Young claims was both "prominent" and "endemic". In fact, "the distinctive feature" of socialist intellectuals in nineteenth-century Britain, be they members of the Fabian Society or the Social Democratic Federation, was their elitism and aloofness from the working classes.[15] The key issue of importance here, then, is to understand how the Fabians developed such a negative attitude towards the working class. Fabian contempt for the working class is much more interesting when it is explained rather than just taken for granted.

Any attempt to explain how the Fabian Society developed such a lack of faith in the working class must discuss first the Fabians' theory of society and belief structure. In order to do so this chapter will examine the primary factors that affected the Fabians' attitude towards the working class. The Fabians' belief in gradualness, organicism, collectivism, social Darwinism and permeation will all be explained in the hope that it will clarify just how the Fabians derived a sort of contempt for the working classes. This in turn, will help to explain why, in what

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[15] For example, James D. Young claims that H.M. Hyndman, Ernest Belford Bax, J. Hunter Watts, Harry Quelch and Herbert Burrows were all "out of touch" with the value, sentiments and culture of the "uneducated", and were hostile in their attitude towards the "spontaneous self-activity of working-people". James D. Young, Socialism and the English Working Class, (Worcester: Billing and Sons, 1989), p. 214.

was considered by some to be "the age of the working man",[16] the Fabians failed to foresee the central role the working class would come to perform in the struggle for independent labour representation.

There can be no doubt the Fabian Society recognized the centrality and importance many of their peers bestowed upon the working class in the struggle to modify the political and social institutions of Britain. With the House of Lords Select Committee inquiry on the "sweating system", the Match Girl Strike at Bryant and May in July of 1888,[17] and the great Dock Strike in August of 1889,[18] the Fabians could not but be aware of it. Indeed, in answer to the question "Where then is the Socialist hope ?" a Fabian Tract once replied, "In the political power of the workers".[19] Yet, as this chapter will explain, giving the working class the prominent role vis-a-vis the state was not central to the Fabian Society's belief structure. On the contrary, the

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[16] David F. Schloss, "The Labour Problem", The Fortnightly Review, vol. 52, (October, 1889), p. 437.

[17] For an account of the role of the Fabian Annie Besant and her newspaper the Link, see E. Royston Pike, Human Documents of the Age of the Forsytes, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1969), pp. 271-279.

[18] E.R. Pease claimed the Fabians as a society took no formal part in the Dock Strike. Individual members of the Fabian Society did. See Pease, History, p. 83. As a further point of interest, 1889 was the worst year on record for industrial troubles. There were 111 strikes in 1889 as compared with 24, 27, and 37 in the three preceding years. See Maureen Tomison, The English Sickness: The Rise of Trade Union Political Power, (London: Tom Stacey Ltd., 1972), p. 112.

[19] Sidney Webb, Fabian Tract 15, "English Progress Towards Social Democracy", (London, Fabian Society, 1890), p. 12.

working class, because of its ignorance and apathy, was often viewed by the Fabian Society as the main obstacle to socialism's success. As William Clarke wrote, the "indifference of the working classes" was "the greatest barrier in the path of their progress".[20] At a time when socialist leaders, such as Tom Mann, Keir Hardie and Ben Tillet, were agitating for the "new unionism" of the unskilled workers and the representation of bona fide workmen in the House of Commons, the Fabian Society was developing what, in 1923, Sidney Webb would coin "the inevitability of gradualness".[21]

The inevitability of gradualness was the belief that socialism would come about peacefully and democratically without class struggle, even without a genuine working-class political party. The Fabians, according to D.E. Nord, thereby separated socialism from the notion of a working-class movement and allowed middle-class intellectuals to develop their own socialist movement.[22] As Bernard Shaw stated, the Fabian Society believed that the middle classes would have "their share in bringing about socialism...".[23] This belief in the inevitability of gradualness was grounded in the Fabians' "theory of society".

The Fabians' theory of society, the theory which originated

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[20] Workman's Times, 23 January, 1891, p. 8.

[21] Lisanne Radice, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, p. 238.

[22] D.E. Nord. The Apprenticeship, pp. 206-207.

[23] G.B. Shaw, Fabian Tract 41, "The Fabian Society: Its Early History", (London, Fabian Society, 1892), p. 28.

the doctrine Fabianism became most associated with, permeation, was based on two essential factors.[24] The first factor was the Fabians' peculiar grasp of history. The Fabians' historic sense was shaped largely by their view of the British class structure and the functions of organicism, science and progress. The second was the Fabians' disillusionment with the "average sensual man" and a correspondingly overblown sense of the importance of intellectual experts. As Beatrice Webb stated in Our Partnership, the Fabians "stacked" their "hopes on the organized working class, served and guarded...by an elite of unassuming experts".[25] One can see how peculiar an effect such a belief would have on any theory of social reform.

Stephen Yeo and Royden Harrison have recently remarked that the Fabians exhibited a "distinctive" socialism that was both

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[24] Michael Holroyd, for example, claims permeation "gradually gave the Society its identity". See Michael Holroyd, Bernard Shaw: The Search for Love, 1856-1898, vol. 1, (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), p. 175. Leo Panitch defined permeation as the "touchstone of Fabian ideology". See Leo Panitch, Working-Class Politics in Crisis: Essays on Labour and the State, (London: Verso, 1986), p. 63.

[25] Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership, p. 7. This statement by Webb perhaps echoed some of Robert Owen's work, whom the Fabians were said to prefer to Karl Marx. In his journal The New Moral World, Owen stated, "...the middle class is the only efficient directing class in society, and will of necessity, remain so, until our system shall create a new class of very superior directors as well as operators...The working class never did direct any permanent successful operations. The circumstances in which they are placed, from birth, render it impossible...". See Robert Owen, "Mr Owen to the Socialist Missionaries", The New Moral World, vol.6, no. 38, (11 July, 1839), p. 595.

"peculiarly English" and extremely metropolitan.[26] Repudiating the revolutionary basis of Marxism and the "static" character of the utopian socialists,[27] Fabians professed a socialism shaped to a great extent by the theories of Auguste Comte, John Stuart Mill, Charles Darwin, and Herbert Spencer. In fact, Webb believed it was through the writings of these four that the concept of "the Social organism" finally penetrated the British mind-set.[28]

Fabians believed Britain's social institutions and economic relations were comparable to biological organisms in that they were subject to a constant and modifying evolution.[29] To this view of organicism the Fabians added a strong belief in the rationality of man and the scientific method. By applying the scientific method to Britain's institutions and social questions, Fabians posited that the "spirit of their times" could be proven to be a positive push in the direction towards a greater emphasis on collectivism. The forces of industrialization and urbanization, according to Fabian theory, distinctly displayed a move from Gladstonian Liberalism, laissez- faire, and

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[26] See Stephen Yeo's theories in Carl Levy, ed. Socialism and the Intelligentsia, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 231. See also Royden Harrison, "Digging the Fabian Digger", Labour History Review, vol. 60(1), (Spring, 1995), p. 68.

[27] G.B. Shaw, ed. Fabian Essays in Socialism,(London, George Allen and Unpin Ltd., 1950), first published 1889, p. 29.

[28] G.B. Shaw, ed. Fabian Essays, p. 43. The Fabians were also particularly influenced by Henry George's Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth: the Remedy, (New York: Double Day, Page and Co., 1919), first published 1879.

[29] G.B. Shaw, ed. Fabian Essays, p. 53.

individualism, from the ideals of competition and self-help, to collectivism and co-operation. Modernity, the "irresistible progress of Democracy", and collectivism were "surging" like a "wave", unconsciously, into all aspects of the British class structure.[30] Britain was becoming a "Social Democratic Commonwealth".[31]

This "unconscious socialism", described by Graham Wallas as the "steady introduction of Socialist institutions" by men who rejected "Socialist ideas", required the Fabian Society simply to help channel it in the proper direction.[32] Collectivism did not require the Fabians to create new political parties; although "the old party names remained unchanged" the Fabians felt all political parties were gradually becoming more socialist. The "tide of Democratic Collectivism" was "rolling in upon" Britain.[33] The Fabian News expressed this opinion in an article in 1894: "twenty years ago the typical young politician was an Individualist quoting Herbert Spencer. Today he is an empirical collectivist of a practical kind".[34] To the Fabians then, there

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[30] Ibid., pp. 31, 30, 49.

[31] Sidney and Beatrice Webb, "Socialism: True and False", Problems of Modern Industry, (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), first published 1902, p. 255.

[32] See Graham Wallas' essay "Property Under Socialism" as found in G.B. Shaw, ed. Fabian Essays, p. 123.

[33] Sidney Webb, Fabian Tract 15, "English Progress Towards Social Democracy", (London, Fabian Society, 1890), p. 3.

[34] Fabian News, February, 1894.

really was no "anti-socialist political party" in Britain.[35] They held that it was a "unique attribute" of democracy that it was capable of "taking the mind of the individual off his own narrow interests" and directing it towards the greater concerns of the community.[36]

Three factors, according to Sidney Webb, marked the politicians' abandonment of "old Individualism". The first factor was the uniform increase of the government's involvement in regulating private enterprise. The second factor was the notable development in municipal administration. The third, was the "shifting" of the majority of taxation "directly to rent and interest".[37] In other words, no longer was the best government that which governed the least. "Functional adaptation" was to take the place of the "struggle for existence".[38] Strong state intervention was to eradicate injustice and inefficiency. The state was to be endowed with a greater sense of social

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[35] Sidney Webb, Fabian Tract 15, "English Progress Towards Social Democracy", p. 3. As Sidney Webb stated "the Conservative party essentially the party of wealth and privilege is naturally less advanced than its rival". But the "Liberal Party has now definitely discarded the Individualist Laissez Faire... and with every approach towards democracy becomes more markedly socialist in character". See Webb, Socialism in England, (Baltimore: American Economic Association, 1889), p. 68.

[36] Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Industrial Democracy, (London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1902), p. 849.

[37] Sidney Webb, Socialism in England, p. 15.

[38] Sidney Webb, "The Difficulties of Individualism", first published 1896, in Problems of Modern Industry, p. 231.

usefulness. As W.C. Clarke stated, the Fabians held that an extension of "public control" was inevitable for two very good reasons. First of all, it originated as a "genuine demand" from the working classes. Secondly, history itself had proven that neither the workman nor the capitalist was "fit for arbitrary power". Clarke distrusted the notions of workers' control as coercive of the community and he called the holders of such ideas an "effete group of economic cranks". What was needed was "public control expressed through the local or national instruments of the state".[39] The Fabians believed that, in time, everyone would see the desirability of subordinating the needs of the individual for the community or the common good.[40]

Yet, as Patrick Joyce notes, Fabianism also set "liberal and individualist limits" to the role of the state.[41] For this reason, while Fabianism called for the nationalization of railways, canals and coal mines, it also allowed for the municipalization of docks, tramways, markets, water supplies and gas. Fabian policy stipulated that County Councils should be placed in charge of preparations for the unemployed, and that all land should be held under municipal ownership.[42] W.C. Clarke's

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[39] W.C. Clarke, "The Limits of Collectivism", Contemporary Review, vol 63, (1893), pp. 268, 265, 266.

[40] Ibid., p. 233.

[41] Patrick Joyce, Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class,(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 79. See also George Mariz, "The Fabians and the Episode of Mr Wells", Research Studies, vol. 15(1), (March, 1983), p. 88.

[42] Nord, The Apprenticeship, p. 206.

article "The Limits of Collectivism" specifically addressed the misconception that state collectivism would result in a formerly free society being "enfolded in the octopus embrace" of some horrible master called the State.[43] Clarke stated,

> Let it at once be admitted that if collectivism makes every human being a mere function of the whole, a mere pin in the wheel, a mere end to others' purposes, then it is impossible; for every strenuous ardent mind will rise in revolt against it. A mechanical uniform civilisation, with complete centralization and tremendous intensity of working power, with the general conditions of life very much as they are now, with the exception that no one would starve, would be a very close approximation to hell...[44]

The real limit to collectivism, according to Clarke, was that it was "co-extensive with the machinery and lower part of life". It provided only for the physical, material basis of existence and thereby released people from the "pressing yoke of mere physical needs". It never interfered with a person's artistic or spiritual matters.[45] In fact, collectivism accorded each individual more leisure time for such matters. As Webb noted, collectivism would shorten the hours a man must work and this in turn would improve a man's "life outside his work".[46]

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[43] W.C. Clarke, "The Limits of Collectivism", Contemporary Review, Vol. 63, (1893), p. 271.

[44] Ibid., p. 271.

[45] For Clarke collectivism was always just a "better way of doing business". It was always confined mainly to "organized material industry" and was inevitable because it derived form the "growth of scientific invention". Ibid., pp. 272, 278.

[46] Sidney Webb, Fabian Tract 75, "Labour in the Longest Reign: 1837-1897", (London, Fabian Society, 1897), p. 13.

Fabians also believed the working classes were becoming more collectivist. The working classes, being "painfully" aware of the failure of individualism to provide for them, were beginning to recognize man's interdependence, or man's dependence upon society.[47] As Sidney Webb remarked, the untutored, "practical man" was irresistibly "driven" in the same collectivist direction as intellectuals familiar with the works of men such as Carlyle, Ruskin, Kingsley, or Spencer.[48] The Fabians upheld as an example of working-class collectivism many of the working-class co-operative movements which existed in nineteenth-century Britain. These co-operative movements, as "distinguished from the middle class projects" of self-help, were, according to Beatrice Webb, "essentially collectivist" in "character and aims". She marvelled that the working class "without administrative training or literary culture" had managed to maintain such collectivist structures.[49]

The Fabians' admiration for working-class initiatives, however, was strictly qualified. As Royden Harrison notes the Fabians may have occasionally saluted the creativity of the working class but they were equally "quick to propose the correct

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[47] See especially Sidney Webb's essay "The Basis of Socialism: Historic", p. 56 and Sydney Olivier's essay "The Basis of Socialism: Moral", p. 105 as found in G.B. Shaw, ed. Fabian Essays.

[48] Ibid., p. 43.

[49] Beatrice Webb, My Apprenticeship, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950), first published 1929, p. 345.

ways of channelling and directing it".[50] The Fabians presumed that a poorly educated working class needed more sophisticated leadership. They were "unembarrassed about relegating other practices as primitive or sentimental when it involved masses of working class people".[51] The working class could not reasonably act without proper guidance from more intellectual citizens. As William Clarke stated, working men could not "in the present state of things, ignore the help which educated men, thoroughly versed in politics and economics" could give them.[52] But just what was the "state of things" according to the Fabian Society?

The Fabian Society believed the people of England needed immediate relief from the disaster of what they termed "wrong production".[53] Wrong production was the result of the existing class system in Britain. Fabians viewed society as being composed essentially of three classes: property owners, intellectual proletariats, and proletarians. Presented in diagram form in John

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[50] Royden Harrison, "The Fabians: Aspects of a very English Socialism", in Iain Hampsher-Monk, ed. Defending Politics: Bernard Crick and Pluralism, (London: British Academic Press, 1993), p. 78.

[51] Stephen Yeo in Carl Levy, ed. Socialism and the Intelligentsia, p. 245.

[52] Workman's Times, 23 January, 1891, p. 8. Three years later Clarke was to describe the working class in the following terms: "The masses are at present, at the very best, an army of privates without officers. This is not their fault, it is their misfortune. They have not the training, the culture, which enables them to meet rich men and their agents on equal ground". See Clarke, "The Fabian Society", New England Magazine, vol. 10 (1894), p. 99.

[53] Sidney Webb, "Difficulties of Individualism", Problems of Modern Industry, p. 234, 242.

Sheldrake's Industrial Relations and Politics in Britain, the propertied classes, by virtue of their ownership of England's land and capital, or the profits from rent and interest, dominated the rest of the class structure, although fewer in number.[54] This propertied or "leisure class" was characterized by Sydney Olivier as a class "not dependent upon its own industry, but feeding like a parasite" on the labour of others.[55] Sidney Webb defined the leisure class as those "persons who take no useful part in the business of life", but were still creating a "new feudal system" in which the propertied class was not required to provide any "social service" to the less fortunate.[56] The intellectual proletariat consisted of salaried managers and other non-manual workers. They earned their living through their intellectual capacity. The proletarian class, the most numerous of the three classes, was composed of both non-manual workers, and to a much larger extent, manual workers. This class knew the virtue of industry and useful activities.[57]

This class structure and the manner in which it was functioning, according to the Fabians, was harmful to society. It fostered "despair, recklessness and drunkeness [sic]" among

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[54] John Sheldrake, Industrial Relations and Politics in Britain: 1880-1989, (London: Printer Pub., 1991), p. 18.

[55] G.B. Shaw, ed. Fabian Essays, p. 109.

[56] Sidney Webb, "Socialism, True and False", Problems of Modern Industry, p 260. Sidney Webb, "The Difficulties of Individualism", Problems of Modern Industry, p. 247.

[57] G.B. Shaw, ed. Fabian Essays, p. 110.

the poor. It created "arrogance and wastefulness" among the rich. It prompted the middle class to exhibit "meaness [sic], envy and snobbery". Poverty promoted disease and crime. It created "stunted bodies and unenlightened minds".[58] The private ownership of land and capital caused an inequality of distribution. The "inevitable corollary" of this unequal distribution was a serious "wrong production" of both commodities and people.[59]

It was because of wrong production that the Fabians felt it necessary to discuss rationally the "breeding" in the slums of Britain of what they termed "degenerate hordes of demoralized residuum". This residuum, this "horde of semi barbarians", was judged by the Fabians to be "unfit for social life."[60] For example, Pease felt "no intellectual seed of any sort" could "germinate in the sickly, sunless atmosphere" of the slum.[61] Graham Wallas believed the "natural result of workdays spent in English factories and English Sundays spent in English streets" was a "longing for excitement, and incapacity for reasonable enjoyment".[62] Sydney Olivier believed that "through inequality of freedom and education, well marked differences in mental habit"

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[58] G.B. Shaw, Fabian Tract 13, "What Socialism Is", (London: Fabian Society), p. 2.

[59] Sidney Webb, "The Difficulties of Individualism", Problems of Modern Industry, p. 234.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Pease, History, p. 19.

[62] G.B. Shaw, ed. Fabian Essays, p. 137.

were apparent between the various classes.[63]

In other words, the Fabians were believers in what Logie Barrow describes as the "educationalist theory". According to Barrow, socialists in the 1880s and 1890s believed that an individual's environment was a decisive factor in shaping his or her character. Believing that individuals could change their existence through alterations in either their environment or or their personal character, Fabians tended to be firm believers in changing the environment through legislation. As Barrow states, with "legislative logic" socialists no longer needed to assure that social legislation be passed or lobbied exclusively by socialists.[64] Any political party would do.

Not shying from the implications of imperialism, Fabians-living in the heart of the Empire, consisting of 13,000,000 square miles of territory and approximately 370,000,000 people-[65] used the imperial card to argue that a change in the environment of the proletarian class was mandatory. Britain could not possibly maintain the status of the greatest imperial power if at the heart of the Empire, in its capital city, numerous poor were breeding persons "unfit for social life".

Christopher Shaw gives a darker slant to the account of the

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[63] Ibid., p. 113.

[64] Logie Barrow , "Determinism and Environmentalism in Socialist Thought", Raphael Samuel and Gareth Stedman Jones, eds. Culture, Ideology and Politics: Essays for Eric Hobsbawm, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 204.

[65] Royden Harrison in Iain Hampsher-Monk ed. Defending Politics, p.85.

Fabians' drive to improve the people of the greatest Empire the world had seen. His article, "Eliminating the Yahoo: Eugenics, Social Darwinism and Five Fabians", states that a "process of normalization", that is the writing of history from the point of view of hindsight, has taken place with Fabianism. A stress on the Fabians' "very real achievements" in the areas of education and municipal collectivization, ignores their equally real concern with Social Darwinism.[66] Shaw claims the Fabians found in Social Darwinism a doctrine that was flexible enough to allow their pursuit of national efficiency. Indeed, he believes Social Darwinism, eugenics and Fabianism could have been "made for each other".[67] To build an imperial power Britain needed a strong imperial race, not "hordes of semi barbarians". The Fabians could argue for improvements in such areas as a national minimum wage on the basis that it would improve the quality of the imperial race.[68] Thus, at its most basic the argument stressed that the government had to spend money to promote reforms to improve the population stock. As Beatrice Webb stated, the British nation could no longer afford to neglect the needs of the "toiling millions". If only "for the sake of the rest of the Empire, the

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[66] Christopher Shaw, "Eliminating the Yahoo: Eugenics, Social Darwinism and Five Fabians", The History of Political Thought, vol. 8, 1987, p.521.

[67] Ibid., p. 543.

[68] Later Fabian Tracts which stressed this view more explicitly were Fabian Tract 108, "Twentieth Century Politics: A Policy of National Efficiency", (London: Fabian Society, 1901) and Fabian Tract 131, "The Decline in the Birth Rate", (London: Fabian Society, 1907). Both Tracts were written by Sidney Webb.

London masses" had "to be organized". "Metropolitan reform had become a national, if not an imperial question".[69] The question of social reform had become a question of national deterioration.

Shaw believes that due to the Fabians' "urban and middle class background", their views of the working class did not move much away from the accepted stereotypes often applied in works such as Andrew Mearns' The Bitter Cry of Outcast London. Fabians lacked the "personal experience" necessary to grasp a true sense of working-class lifestyles. Hence, the chief belief common among D.G. Ritchie, H.G. Wells, G.B. Shaw, Beatrice Webb and Sidney Webb was the unproven Fabian conviction that the "wrong stratum of the population was increasing too rapidly".[70] For example, Bernard Shaw believed the very poor bred "like rabbits",[71] while Sidney Webb noted the "evil effect" inequality had on the "multiplication of the race".[72] Christopher Shaw contends that to combat this multiplication of the race the Fabians proposed collectivist remedies which supposedly promised a greater security and control over the environment, at the expense of personal freedom. Thus Christopher Shaw judged Fabianism to be somewhat "totalitarian" in that it often sought to dominate and

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[69] Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership, p. 61-62.

[70] Christopher Shaw, "Eliminating the Yahoo", The History of Political Thought, vol.8, (1987), pp. 538, 539.

[71] G.B. Shaw, ed. Fabian Essays, p. 20.

[72] Sidney Webb, "Difficulties of Individualism", Problems of Modern Industry, p. 242.

control people.[73]

Were the Fabians such totalitarians towards the working class, or were they perhaps using the imperialist card just as an excuse to push forward social reforms? It is probably impossible to say. Lisanne Radice does not believe the Webbs were totalitarian. She believes the later statements made by the Webbs in their book Soviet Communism led people to judge them as totalitarian.[74] Clive E. Hill argues that the early Fabian Society was in all likelihood judged more harshly due to their later more obvious Darwinistic statements.[75]

Yet, despite the factors which motivated the Fabian Society to act, there can be no doubt that the Fabian Society had the best interest of the working class at heart. The Fabians' attempts to improve the welfare of the working class is well documented. They called for further factory regulations, the establishment of the minimum wage, workers' unemployment insurance, old age pensions, poor law and housing reforms. The Fabian Society canvassed for adult suffrage, payment of members of parliament, the Second ballot, taxation of unearned incomes, and better education. Fabian Tract 37, published in 1899, exemplified the Fabians' belief in the proper treatment of labour. It called for a normal eight hour day, wages not less

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[73] Christopher Shaw, "Eliminating the Yahoo", The History of Political Thought, vol. 8, (1987), p. 544.

[74] Radice, Beatrice and Sidney Webb, p. 308.

[75] Clive E. Hill, Understanding, p. 10.

than the standards set by trade unions, one day's rest in seven, and the prohibition of overtime and "home work" in sweated trades.[76]

Moreover, the early Fabians were not notably motivated by selfish personal interest. As Stephen Yeo writes, many factors, besides self interest, lead people towards socialism. Poverty, wealthy aimlessness, unfocused indignation, religious eclecticism, unresolved guilt, domestic unhappiness, or social unease often preceded a person's conversion to socialism.[77] Beatrice Webb, for example, spoke of the collective "consciousness of sin among men of intellect and men of property".[78] Yet while there is no doubt the Fabian Society was concerned about the welfare of the working class, their belief in collectivist remedies, in organicism, and in the rationality of man, led the Fabians to belittle the ability of the working class to promote the struggle for labour representation and led to the policy of permeation.

Permeation, as R.C.K. Ensor notes, was a political term that

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[76] Various Fabian Tracts argued for improvements for the working class. See Tract 3, "To Provident Landlords and Capitalists" (1885), Tract 5, "Facts for Socialists" (1899), Tract 6, "The True Radical Programme", (1887), Tract 9, "An Eight Hours Bill", (1890), Tract 11, "The Workers Political Programme", (1890), Tract 37, "A Labour Policy for Public Authorities", (revised 1899) as found in Fabian Tracts.

[77] Stephen Yeo, "A New Life: the Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896", History Workshop Journal, vol. 4, (Autumn, 1977), p. 10.

[78] Beatrice Webb, My Apprenticeship, p. 154-155.

was capable of conveying several meanings.[79] For the early Fabian Society, acutely conscious of Britain's well-established two-party system, permeation essentially meant a policy tactic which denied the necessity of founding their own political organizations to implement social reforms. With permeation it was judged more expedient to attempt to influence and manipulate social policy through already existing parties. As "Fabius" stated, instead "of wasting time in forming new sects" the typical Fabian tried "to inoculate with his socialism the existing organizations- the political clubs, the caucuses, the trade unions, the press, the co-operative societies, and the rival party leaders".[80] This doctrine of permeation combined the Roman General Fabius' idea of wearing down his competitor with constant pressure and the rationalists' belief that all reasonable people could be rationalized into accepting reforms.[81]

In theory, then, permeation was the policy of encouraging Fabians to join any established club, organization or political party in order to channel and direct it along collectivist lines. The Fabian Society, therefore, did not believe they required a special organization to proceed by permeation. As Sidney Webb stated the Fabian Society was not a "political organization". The

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[79] R.C.K. Ensor in Margaret Cole, ed. Webbs and Their Work, p. 57.

[80] Workman's Times, 7 August, 1891, p. 8.

[81] Eric Hopkins, Working-Class Self-Help in Nineteenth Century England: Responses to Industrialisation, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), p. 141.

Fabians sought to be above the realm of particular politics and to offer their research abilities to any enlightened politician or administrator. They sought to infiltrate peacefully the minds of the enlightened.

In practice, however, in a very specific sense, Fabian permeation came to mean the permeation of the radical, progressive wing of the Liberal Party. As W.C. Clarke admitted, the Fabians entered the political arena "above all perhaps to weaken and destroy the individualist wing of the Liberal Party".[82] E. R. Pease was to echo this view when he wrote that the "main object of the Fabians was to force on the Liberal Party a programme of constructive social reform".[83] Fabian attempts to permeate the Liberal party began as early as 1887.[84] According to Pease it "had been easy" for the Fabians to permeate the Liberals because so many Fabians had been previously connected with the Liberal Party. It was not so easy for the Fabians to permeate the Conservatives because the Fabians were neither in touch with the Conservatives' general organization nor shared many of the same notions on social reform.[85]

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[82] William Clarke, "The Fabian Society", New England Magazine, vol. 10, (1894), p. 94.

[83] Pease, History, p. 111.

[84] Mcbriar, Fabian Socialism, p. 236. The Fabians appear to have begun permeating the Liberals after the Party's Nottingham Programme irritated the radical wing of the Liberal Party. For more information see the Fabians' 1888 "Wanted a Programme: An Appeal to the Liberal Party".

[85] Pease, The History of the Fabian Society, p. 111.

This belief that socialism could be advanced by socializing the radical wing of the Liberal Party was further depicted in G.B. Shaw's attempt to explain in the Workman's Times what permeation was. Shaw defined a permeator specifically as someone who viewed the Liberal Party as a "nucleus of Whigs misleading a mass of poor men, all convertible into Socialists...". Shaw characterized a "non-permeator" as a person who was firmly convinced that the Liberal Party consisted completely of "mammoth capitalists all holding the exact opinions of Mr. John Morley and all irreconcilable enemies of Labour".[86]

The Fabians' permeation tactic emphasized the Society's stress on the importance of influencing officials, professionals, and intellectuals in the world of business and politics. The Fabians believed nothing was done in Britain without the "consent of a small intellectual yet highly practical class in London not two thousand in number" which the Fabians "alone could get at".[87] The consequences of such a belief were many. Obviously the Fabians were not conditioned to believe they would require a mass following of supporters to implement their social reforms. They simply had to influence key officials to reform the British institutional system. As Beatrice Webb stated, "Do we want to organize the unthinking persons into socialist societies or to

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[86] Workman's Times, 10 December, 1892, p. 1. Shaw held that Morley was too taken by the belief in individualism to appreciate the efforts of collectivist radicals.

[87] Sidney and Beatrice Webb, The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, vol. 1., edited by Norman Mackenzie, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 101.

make the thinking persons socialistic? We believe in the latter process".[88] This belief facilitated the Fabian Society in moving further and further away from any serious attempt to organize massive support among the working class for its policies. Subsequently, the Fabian Society never organized any serious sustained attempt to organize the working class into its own independent political party. As Beatrice Webb noted, it had always been "against the policy of the Fabians to organize people".[89] The Fabians had "never advanced the smallest pretension to represent the working classes" of Britain.[90] In seeking collectivist remedies to society's problems, through permeation, the Fabians failed to understand the drive that was amassing in the working class for further independent labour representation.

It must be noted here, however, that there were official challenges to the Fabian Society's pursuit of the permeation policy. Disagreeing with permeating Fabians' boasts that

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[88] This statement was written by Beatrice Webb on 16 April, 1896. See, Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership, p. 132. As Stanley Pierson acknowledges, the strategy of permeation denied the "need for radical change in the consciousness of people at large and rejected as well the need for a strong assertion of working class power". Pierson, Marxism, p. 127. Thus, permeation was not a "policy of popularization". W.H. Greenleaf, The British Political Tradition, p. 401.

[89] Ibid.

[90] G.B. Shaw, Fabian Tract 41, "The Fabian Society: What it Has Done and How it Has Done it", (London: Fabian Society, 1892), p. 23.

permeation obviously worked,[91] other members, supported by Hubert Bland and Annie Besant, urged that British socialists organize themselves as a separate political party. A letter from Sidney Webb to E.R. Pease confirms a tension between those who believed in permeation and those who desired a more independent socialist movement. Webb's letter documented his belief that the "younger impatient element of the society" had "risen up in rebellion" and wanted to "throw the whole movement entirely into the Labour Party".[92] This letter was dated 11 December 1891. Yet, even prior to this date, the Fabian Society had what might be termed a brief flirtation with the notions of an independent socialist party. On 17 September 1886 members of the Fabian Society carried a resolution by 47 to 19 that formed the Fabian Parliamentary League. This league was set up in order to test the possibilities of direct Fabian political action. It issued two Fabian Tracts and one manifesto, but proved unable to sustain itself and within a year was again absorbed by the Society.[93]

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[91] To illustrate that permeation worked Fabians often pointed to the progressives' success on the London County Council. In 1892 Sidney Webb himself was elected as a Progressive candidate for Deptford. As Shaw wrote, "We permeated the party organizations and pulled all the wires we could lay our hands on with our utmost adroitness and energy and we succeeded so far that in 1888 we gained the solid advantage of a Progressive majority full of ideas that would never have come into their heads had not the Fabian put them there, on the first London County Council". See G.B. Shaw, Fabian Tract 41, "The Fabian Society: Its Early History", p. 19.

[92] Sidney Webb to E.R. Pease 11 December, 1891. See Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Letters, vol. 1, p. 350.

[93] G.B. Shaw, Fabian Tract, 41, "The Fabian Society: Its Early History", (London: Fabian Society, 1892), p. 12-14.

The two Fabians who from early on had supported the drive to guide the Fabian Society into a more active, independent, political role, Annie Besant and Hubert Bland, also proved unable to sustain any momentum for the project. Annie Besant, judged by Stanley Pierson to be the Fabian most likely to appeal directly to the people, had resigned from the Fabian Society on 21 November 1890 to join the Theosophy movement.[94] Meanwhile, Hubert Bland, a Tory by disposition, never had the strong support of the Fabian Executive. As R.C.K. Ensor observes, Bland's views were not "typical of the Society".[95] Shaw, who "flitted lightly" between permeators and independents,[96] wrote in his letters of "Wallas aspiring fretfully towards a Blandless universe".[97] Moreover, Bland, who openly criticized some of the Fabians' "brightest and other wise clear sighted" members for relying on permeation, did not see the time as ripe for a well-led, working-class party. Indeed, as Bland's essay entitled the "Outlook" posited, he felt the leader the independent socialist movement

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[94] Pierson, Marxism, p. 125. Catherine Lowman Wessinger, Annie Besant and Progressive Messianism, (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1988), p. 61, also notes that Besant was "continually trying to get the Fabians to take part in practical politics". See also Zygmunt Bauman, Between Class and Elite, p. 213, Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, The Fabians, (New York: Simon Schuster, 1977), p. 145.

[95] Margaret Cole, Webbs and Their Work, p. 58. Pease described Bland in the following terms: "He was a sound Socialist, but otherwise Tory, and the rest of us were born Liberals". Ibid., p. 19.

[96] McBriar, Fabian Socialism, p. 246.

[97] G.B. Shaw's letter of 16 December, 1890 in Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters, p. 276.

required was probably still in "his cradle or equitably sharing out toys or lollipops to his comrades of the nursery".[98]

Permeation, especially between 1895 and 1905 became the central policy of the Fabian Society. How did this affect the relationship between the intellectual proletariat and the "swarming multitudes of workers"? William Clarke believed this was the most "vital social question" of the 1890s.[99] An examination of the Fabians' attitude towards the working class, as contained in their various tracts and observations will help us to understand what role the Fabian Society felt the worker was capable of maintaining in their theory of society.

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[98] G.B. Shaw, ed. Fabian Essays, p. 254.

[99] W.C. Clarke, "The Fabian Society, New England Magazine, vol. 10 (1894), p. 98.

Chapter Four

Fabian Attitudes Towards the Working Class

It is probably a truism that most middle-class socialists who theorized about the working class in the nineteenth-century almost always provided their own very biased account of what they understood the working class to be. The Fabian Society was no exception. It provided a view of the working class that was greatly coloured by Fabian notions and Fabian prejudices.[1] Having "disabling gaps" in their knowledge of Victorian England,[2] and preferring the "kitchen of life"[3] to almost anything else, the Fabians, in fact, had little first-hand knowledge of the unskilled, unorganized, provincial working classes. As Michael Davitt charged, the Fabians probably knew "just as little about the real life and hardships of the working poor as other middle-class people".[4]

This lack of first-hand knowledge, however, did not prevent the Fabian Society from commenting on what they took to be the successes and failures of working class lifestyles. It did not prevent them from rejecting working-class culture in favour of

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[1] David Selbourne, Against Socialist Illusion: A Radical Argument, (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1985), p. 70.

[2] Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership, p. 13-14. The disabling gaps she described related to a lack of knowledge in the areas of sports, games, racing, foreign affairs, music, drama, picture galleries, etc.

[3] Sidney and Beatrice Webb. The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, vol. 1, edited by Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 347. The "kitchen of life" referred to trade unions and the details of administration.

[4] Michael Davitt, "Fabian Fustian", The Nineteenth Century, vol. 34, (December, 1893), p. 855.

more rational alternatives.[5] It definitely did not prevent the Fabian Society from assuming it could tell what the working class did or did not know. As H.W. Massingham noted, the Fabian Society had a tendency to preach to the working class combined with an inclination to presume they could tell what the working class thought. For example, he sarcastically noted that the Fabians were often "good enough to inform the English worker that he [did] not care a dump for Home Rule".[6] In Massingham's statement a sense of what Patricia Pugh termed the Fabians' "lack of common touch" becomes clearly evident.[7]

In other words, while the Fabian Society may have promoted themselves as the authoritative, disinterested social investigators of working-class life, they often contaminated their studies on the working class with the biases of the "nouvelle couche sociale".[8] That is to say, the Fabians combined a desire to better the working class with the characteristic aspects of a "would be dictator of what to think and what to

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[5] It should be noted here that the Fabians also rejected the upper-class traditions of a classical, literary education. They held that such an education served no practical purpose and trained people to be essentially useless. One of their main reasons for founding the London School of Economics was to combat such education. See E.H. Hunt, "Labour History at the LSE", Society for the Study of Labour History, (Autumn, 1982), pp. 11-14.

[6] H. W. Massingham, "The Government and Labour", The Contemporary Review, vol. LXIV, (December, 1893), p. 772.

[7] Patricia Pugh, Educate, Agitate, Organize: One Hundred Years of Fabian Socialism, (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 71.

[8] E.J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men, p. 266.

do".[9] In an attempt to understand Fabian attitudes towards the working class the first part of this chapter will explain the early enthusiasm the Fabian Society had for the working class' ability to bring about collectivism. It will then discuss two major ways in which the working class frustrated Fabian expectations and, subsequently, increased Fabian distrust of working-class initiatives. Finally, the Fabians' sense of disillusionment with the working class and their concomitant failure to appreciate the opinions of their local Fabian Societies, and labour men such as Kier Hardie and Ramsay Macdonald will be examined.

The London Fabian Society, there can be no doubt, initially expressed a sense of hope in the ability of the working class to help bring about collectivism. Although the Fabians believed that all classes in society would inevitably assist in the transformation to collectivism, they concluded that the working class, because it "suffered the most" by the system, would logically be the class most actively seeking to modify society.[10] This, according to Shaw, was the "progressive element" in an otherwise dark situation. The poor, unlike the "respectable classes" in society, could not divorce themselves from the problems created by inequality and wrong production. Poverty itself would rouse the workers to transform society's status

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[9] Workman's Times, 17 December, 1892, p. 1.

[10] G.B. Shaw, "Illusions of Socialism", in Edward Carpenter, ed. Forecasts of the Coming Century, (London, 1897), p. 160, as cited in Wiener, Between Two Worlds, p. 37.

quo.[11] Disagreeing with the individualists' desire simply to improve the poor by preaching thrift and sobriety, the Fabians felt the working class could help transform society more concretely by focusing on effecting political change.[12] Indeed, the Fabians were of the opinion that there could be "no remedy without political change",[13] and put as the workers' main priority the "Disestablishment and Disendowment of Idleness".[14]

The Fabians believed the working class stood a chance of promoting political change owing to the Reform Bill of 1884, and the fact that approximately four out of every five electors in Britain were wage workers.[15] Thus, by sheer numbers alone, the working class was poised to create serious political alterations.[16] Monetary funds would not have to be a problem. The

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[11] G.B. Shaw, "What Mr. Gladstone Ought to Do", Fortnightly Review,(February, 1893), p. 277. See also Sidney Webb, Fabian Tract 8, "Facts for Londoners", (London: Fabian Society, 1889) for a collection of statistical data relating the extent to which the Fabians believed the poor in London suffered. For example, Webb asserted that in London one person in every five was destined to die in the workhouse, the hospital or the lunatic asylum. See p. 7.

[12] Sidney Webb, "Difficulties of Individualism", Problems of Modern Industry, p. 237.

[13] G.B. Shaw, Fabian Tract 13, "What Socialism Is", (London: Fabian Society, revised 1894), p. 2.

[14] G.B. Shaw, Fabian Tract 40, "Fabian Election Manifesto", (London: Fabian Society, 1892), p. 4.

[15] The Fabian Society, "To Your Tents Oh Israel", The Fortnightly Review, vol. 54, (November, 1893), p. 587.

[16] The Fabian writer "Marxian" expressed a similar notion. Marxian wrote, the "working classes in this country number four-fifths of the population. If these four-fifths knew exactly what they wanted and were resolved to get it, the remaining fifth

Fabians estimated that if every male worker was charged a subscription of only three half pence per annum the working class could amass a fund of some 50,000 pounds per year for parliamentary purposes.[17] As William Clarke stated, even "with our present imperfect machinery working men could, if they liked, capture half the municipalities in the country".[18]

In other words, the Fabian Society was interested in prompting the rise of what they termed "active citizens". As Beatrice Webb stated, "[we] were active citizens".[19] They wanted the working class to emulate the Fabians' sense of political participation. Yet, in two important ways the working class was not living up to the standards the Fabian Society had set. One way was in their political apathy. The second was in their inability to see a commonality of interests with other workers. These two factors prompted the Fabians' belief that the "difficulty in England" was "not to secure more political power for the people but to persuade them to make any sensible use of

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could not stand in their way a single week. The strength, therefore of the one-fifth lies in the support- negative and positive- it receives from the four-fifths. Which means, further, that the one-fifth in the struggle for existence, has out generalled and out manoeuvred [sic] the four-fifths..." See Workman's Times, 2 September, 1893, p. 1.

[17] G.B. Shaw, Fabian Tract 40, "Fabian Election Manifesto", (London: Fabian Society, 1892), p. 8.

[18] Workman's Times, 23 January, 1891, p. 8.

[19] Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership, p. 16.

the power they already" had.[20] It also underlined the fact that the Fabians had "little faith in the average sensual man". As Beatrice Webb noted, the Fabians did not believe the average sensual man could "do much more than describe his own grievances". The Fabians certainly did not think the working class could "prescribe the remedies" to society's problems.[21]

The first charge made by the Fabians against the working class was that it was apathetic and ignorant of politics. As Chris Waters states, among those socialists who agitated for an eight hour day, which the Fabians certainly did, it was often hoped that the workers would use the increase in leisure time in a constructive fashion: to further their education, increase their knowledge of their nation's cultural heritage, or help out in socialist movements.[22] But the Fabian Society, which tirelessly encouraged the working class to vote, to take an interest in the political scene of Britain, was bound to be

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[20] For example, the Fabians felt the working classes were not using the Reform Bill of 1884 to full effect. G.B. Shaw, Fabian Tract 70, "Report on Fabian Policy and Resolutions", (London: Fabian Society, 1896), p. 5.

[21] Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership, p. 120. This statement was written by Webb on 29 December, 1894. An illustration of this Fabian belief was provided by E.R. Pease. Pease stated, for example, that although the protest for an eight hour day was a working class demand, put forward by organized labour, its success would have been much "slower had the manual workers been left to fight their own battle". See E.R. Pease, History, p. 241.

[22] Chris Waters. British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture: 1884-1914, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 8.

disillusioned.[23] As a survey conducted by Julia Dawson for the Clarion stated, in 1901, even among those persons who joined socialist movements in the late nineteenth-century, their reasons for doing so were often far from political. Dawson's respondents instead decided to join a socialist movement for the entertaining outings, the literary and music study, the arts and crafts, the chances to help the poor, and so on. Political work was actually at the bottom of the list.[24]

The Fabians were quite disillusioned by the working classes' perceived failure to act more politically. In one of their tracts the Fabians depicted the working class as being "ill organized", "easily led away by fine phrases", and so "deficient in any genuine, practical, business-like knowledge of politics and finance" that they typically allowed budgets to be drawn up which were quite harmful to them.[25] To the Fabians the average British working man was a "political pauper".[26]

Bernard Shaw expanded on this opinion of the working classes' political inefficiency in an article to the Fortnightly Review, in 1894. He stated that a person needed to be a "skilled citizen" in order to know, for example, whether Mr. W. E.

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[23] See for example G.B. Shaw, Fabian Tract 43, "Vote! Vote!! Vote!!!".

[24] The Clarion, 23 November, 1901, p. 2.

[25] J.F. Oakeshott, Fabian Tract 39, "A Democratic Budget", (London: Fabian Society, 1892), p. 3.

[26] G.B. Shaw, Fabian Tract 40, "Fabian Election Manifesto", (London: Fabian Society, 1892), p. 15.

Gladstone was a good candidate to vote for during an election. Shaw estimated that less than one percent of Britain's voters were skilled enough to base their political decisions on "measures not men". The average working-class voter was either an "ignorant trifler of politics", a man who "followed the flag blindly" or a person who judged politicians by their command of "political claptrap".[27] This, according to the Fabian Society went a long way in explaining why some of the working class actually venerated a politician like Gladstone, while others did not vote at all.[28]

Perhaps to counter worker ignorance and political apathy, the Fabian Society not only provided a steady flow of educational tracts, they also in some of their tracts offered what they themselves understood to be "bitter but well deserved reproaches to the working class".[29] For example, Fabian Tract 40 stated that the same workingman who excused his deficient political participation on a lack of education, money, or opportunity, really had no defence. For that same worker was at "no loss" when the topic was "football..racing...pigeon flying, or any subject

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[27] G.B. Shaw, "What Mr. Gladstone Ought to Do", Fortnightly Review,(February, 1893), p. 277.

[28] It should be noted here that to Shaw the role of the Fabians had always been anti-Gladstonian. See Peter Clarke, Liberals and Social Democrats, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 84.

[29] G.B. Shaw, Fabian Tract 49, "A Plan for the Campaign of Labour", (London: Fabian Society, 1893), p. 19. Between 1887 and 1893 an estimated three-quarters of a million tracts were circulated by the Fabians. See Eric Hopkins, Working-Class Self-Help in 19th Century England, p. 142.

however complicated" that the working class wanted to "understand".[30] The problem, in short, was sheer laziness on the part of the working class. The workers did not want to go through the bother of becoming better acquainted with politics in Britain. The average British working man would "neither do his own political work, nor pay anyone else to do it for him". A British worker seemed to feel he displayed "sufficient public spirit" if he simply listened to a canvasser.[31]

This was intolerable to the Fabians. For the Fabian Society the true test of a class's political capacity was "shewn by its power to make the most of ordinary circumstances". Under ordinary circumstances the working class, according to the Fabians, did "nothing at all". Meanwhile, the upper and middle classes organized and supported their political candidates no matter how obscure the constituency. Even the success of the working class in Battersea, in 1892, although judged by the Fabians to be a "striking" example of a politically organized working class, was ultimately held as having proved "nothing". The success of the Battersea working class had been motivated by the "exceptional ability" of a candidate (John Burns) popularized by an extraordinary event (the Dock Strike of 1889). It was not won under "ordinary circumstances".[32]

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[30] G.B. Shaw, Fabian Tract 40, "Fabian Election Manifesto", (London, Fabian Society, 1892), p. 9.

[31] Ibid., pp. 15, 10.

[32] Bernard Shaw, Fabian Tract 40, "Fabian Election Manifesto", (London: Fabian Society, 1892), p. 9

The second major way in which the working class disappointed the Fabians was in their apparent refusal to band together in a political movement which would stand up for working-class rights, and fuel the drive for collectivism. Bernard Shaw, for example, wrote of his discouragement over the failure of the Lancashire working class to stand up for their collective rights as political equals. He noted, in a letter to Beatrice Potter, that the Lancashire working men were "slaves through and through". The Lancashire men stood up for their political rights as "INFERIORS" and accepted the position of inferiors "objectively". In Shaw's opinion the Lancashire working men required a "thorough rousing".[33]

Many Fabians would have agreed with Shaw's observations. According to the Fabians, workers had to be motivated by more than just the opportunistic lure of gaining individual advantages for themselves. In order to address the broader issues of political change, workers needed to agitate for something besides specific issues in their own particular trade. No longer were the bread and butter issues of improved working conditions, better pay and fewer hours to be the ultimate aim of the labour

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[33] G.B. Shaw to Beatrice Potter, 6 October, 1890, Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters 1874-1897, vol. 1, edited by Dan H. Laurence, (London: Max Reinhardt, 1965), p. 267. The fact that the working class regarded themselves quite complacently as inferiors infuriated the Fabian Society partially because it went contrary to their belief that in modern society the individual worker would lose control over his personal life and this would encourage him to seek collectively what had become individually impossible; that is, to be the master of his own industry. See Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Industrial Democracy, p. 850.

movement. As Sidney Webb stated, the labour interests of a worker could no longer be confined to what affected him personally.[34] The working class needed a "common programme" that could unite workers in a concentrated political movement.[35]

Yet the working classes, according to the Fabians, were not banding together to protect their rights and promote the movement towards collectivism. As Sidney Webb stated, "I sometimes think that the working man forgets very often that he does not live alone...".[36] Thus the working class was dishonouring one of the Fabian Society's key beliefs: that "social health" and subsequently "human happiness" were "something apart from and above the separate interests of individuals".[37]

Subsequent articles in the Workman's Times likewise addressed the argument that the workers refused to see the interdependence of every individual within society.[38] "Marxian" suggested that the behaviour of the "average British" workman clearly indicated that he saw no advantage in promoting unity among his fellow workers. The average British worker did not even show sufficient regret that his class was being "trampled upon"

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[34] Workman's Times, 6 February, 1892, p. 7.

[35] Ibid., 23 January 1892, p. 8.

[36] Ibid., 6 February, 1892, p. 7.

[37] Sidney Webb, "The Difficulties of Individualism", Problems of Modern Industry, p. 233.

[38] As William Clarke stated, workers refused to see the "fading away of independence before interdependence". See William Clarke, "The Limits of Collectivism", Contemporary Review, Vol. 63, (1893), p. 264.

by the capitalists. The only thing the average worker regretted was that he was "not a capitalist himself".[39] Lindley Maxfeld, in a letter to the editor of the Workman's Times, also believed the workers were blind to the benefits of advancing a united working-class front. Maxfeld stated that the "workers of England" were "very like children". For two thousand years mankind had taught the worker to "look out for number one". The result of such a lesson was that the worker was "sublimely indifferent" to the claims of his fellow workers. Maxfeld summarized his view of the situation by stating that some workers would not see the advantage of nationalizing the mines because they were woodcutters. Other workers would not see anything beneficial in a project for nationalizing the railroads, because they were in the canal boat industry. The workers needed to be taught that all of labours' interests, no matter how different, were "bound together".[40]

Even the trade unions, the bastions of the more organized working classes, seemed selfish by Fabian standards. The term "trade union" was defined by the Webbs in their 1894 work The History of Trade Unionism as "a continuous association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining and improving the conditions of their working lives".[41] While the Webbs placed much

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[39] Workman's Times, 2 September, 1893, p. 1.

[40] Ibid., 16 September, 1893, p. 1.

[41] Sidney and Beatrice Webb, The History of Trade Unionism, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1926), p. 1. In the 1894 edition of this work the definition had "employment" in place of

value on trade unions, the Fabian Society had two constant criticisms of trade unionism. The first was that it represented only a small minority of the working class. Consequently, the unions were vastly indifferent to the miseries of the mass of unskilled casual workers. For example, in 1890 the Fabians estimated that the trade unions represented approximately one tenth of the whole of the labouring class. This one tenth was held by the Fabians to be a type of labour aristocracy who procured their sufficient wages by actually limiting the number of workmen allowed in a particular trade. Thus, the Fabians asserted that the trade unionist could "usually only raise himself on the bodies of his less fortunate comrades".[42]

The second criticism the Fabians had of trade unionism had to do with its sectional nature. In 1894 the Webbs again underlined that it was the nature of most working men to join in association with unions primarily for sectional reasons. The Webbs believed working men "came together and contributed their pence, for the defence of their interests as Boilermakers, Miners, Cottonspinners, and not directly for the advancement of the whole working class".[43] Moreover, as Sidney Webb explained,

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"working lives". Yet, the intention of the 1894 edition was the 1920 wording. See also N. Robertson and K.I. Sams, eds. British Trade Unionism: Selected Documents, vol. 1, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), p. 42.

[42] Sidney Webb, Fabian Tract 15, "English Progress Towards Social Democracy", (London: Fabian Society, 1890), p. 8.

[43] Sidney and Beatrice Webb, History of Trade Unionism, p. 678.

many of London's trade unionists were solely interested in advancing the benefits of only their own particular trade. This seemed absurd to Webb. For, as he explained, many of London's trade unionists were

> driven to live in ...vile tenements, to the detriment of their own character, the degeneration of their skill, the sickness of their wives, and the stinted growth and premature death of their children. Would it not be a little absurd if these men were to limit their interests in the County Council election merely to a question of wages and hours? [44]

Faced throughout the 1890s with what they saw as the working classes' inept political practices and selfish behaviour, the Fabians displayed an increasingly strong sense of disillusionment with the overall working-class movement. Though willing to accept the "conditions" imposed on it by "human nature... the national character and political circumstances of the English people",[45] the Fabians failed to see why the working class was not "going their way".[46] This sense of disillusionment was perhaps best expressed by Beatrice Webb just one month before the founding of the LRC:

> To us public affairs seem gloomy; the middle class are materialistic, and the working-class stupid, and in large sections sottish,

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[44] Workman's Times, 6 February, 1892, p. 7.

[45] G.B. Shaw, Fabian Tract 70, "Report on Fabian Policy and Resolutions", (London, Fabian Society, 1896), p. 4.

[46] Beatrice Webb, The Diary of Beatrice Webb, vol. I, edited by Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 327. The diary entry was dated the 22nd or 23rd of February, 1890.

> with no interest except in racing odds... The social enthusiasm that inspired the intellectual proletariat of ten years ago has died down and given place to a wave of scepticism about the desirability, or possibility of any substantial change in society as we know it.[47]

Hardly a statement promoting faith in the working classes' ability to build and maintain their own political party. The working class may have been, by virtue of their numbers, poised to take over the political arena. That, however, did not mean they were intellectually prepared for the task.[48]

Indeed, a debate in the Workman's Times makes the point quite clear that the Fabian Society did not feel the working class was ready to control a labour organization that would be completely independent of the Liberal and Conservative parties. In 1891 in a section of the Workman's Times entitled "Cunctatorian Fancies" a debate was launched over the feasibility of founding a working-class political party. "Cunctator" received replies from four leading Fabians: G.B. Shaw, E.R. Pease, Sidney Webb and William Clarke. Though all four Fabians agreed that a labour party representative of the working class was needed, all four gave reasons as to why one could not be formed in the

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[47] 31 January, 1900, Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership, p. 195. This quote, slightly altered, also appears in The Diary of Beatrice Webb, vol. II, p. 169: the sense of disillusionment is the same but the working class is described as stupid and "selfish" instead of stupid and "sottish".

[48] Fabian Tract 40 made this point very clearly. It stated that the working classes were not "politically organized enough to take the overwhelming lead in politics which their superiority in numbers" had "placed within their reach". See G.B. Shaw, Fabian Tract 40, "Fabian Election Manifesto", (London: Fabian Society, 1892), p. 6.

immediate future. Shaw, for example, claimed that the working class due to its "faithlessness and cowardice" could not be counted on to support a Labour Party. While working men showed up at socialist lectures on the "Labour Question" and signified their agreement with "everything that was said", they still would not stick to socialist advice. Instead they voted for men whose "interests" were "diametrically opposed to their own". To Shaw these actions were concrete proof that the working class lacked the "genuine vital faith in human equality" from which the policy and programme of a future labour party would "spring spontaneously".[49]

E.R. Pease and Sidney Webb also believed that there was not much chance of successfully establishing a labour party that would become a force in British politics. Pease was of the opinion that history itself taught that socialists did not have much success in forming independent labour movements. Moreover, he classified the men who attempted to form their own political parties, independent from both the Liberals and Conservatives, as those men who typically were the "most careless about measures". The Fabian Society wanted measures not men. Sidney Webb agreed. Webb believed that there was not a chance "as of yet", of forming an effective labour party. According to Webb the "nature of an Englishman" seemed "to be suited only to a political fight

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[49] Workman's Times, 23 January, 1891, p. 8.

between two parties...".[50]

William Clarke, in response to the question "is a workman's party possible?", responded by providing neither a yes or no answer. Instead Clarke supplied the Workman's Times with a list of the major difficulties that stood in the way of a workers' political party. One difficulty was the undemocratic nature of the British political system, which made it as hard as possible for a workman to vote. What was needed was equal manhood suffrage, state registration, a second ballot and so on, before a workers' party could be successfully attempted. Most significantly, yet again, Clarke stressed that the working-class was apathetic and divided by divergent interests.[51] No workers' party could be established under these conditions.

Hand in hand with this disillusionment in the performance of the working class went a concomitant failure on the part of the Fabian Society to appreciate or understand any developments which attempted to organize and lead a labour party based on trade unionism and worker representation. The Fabians' disregard for the importance of the working class, their belief that the workers were not intellectually ready to lead a labour movement, was highlighted especially in their attitude towards their own

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[50] Workman's Times, 30 January, 1891, p. 8. G.B. Shaw, also noted the "difficulties which hamper the beginnings of a third political party in England". These difficulties he felt could only be appreciated by those who had learnt "them from practical electioneering experience". See Fabian Tract 40, "Fabian Election Manifesto", p. 5.

[51] Workman's Times, 23 January, 1891, p. 8.

local Fabian Societies and in their judgements on the abilities of the men who were later to become the corner stones of the early LRC. The Fabians' failure to recognize the importance of the local Fabian Societies and labour men such as Keir Hardie, must be viewed as two examples where they missed opportunities to become concretely involved in the struggle to found a new political party- operated and engineered by the working class.

The provincial Fabian Societies, first founded in the winter of 1890, just after the successful publication of Fabian Essays and the Dock Strike, were decidedly more linked to the feelings and notions of the developing labour movement than the London Fabian Society.[52] Unlike the London Fabian Society, which attracted mostly middle-class intellectuals and people of influence, the provincial Fabian Societies were typically composed of working-class people. For example, with the provincial societies, Fabian membership came to include such men as Keir Hardie, Tom Mann, Ben Tillet, Robert Blatchford, Peter Curran, Fred Henderson, and many other less known members of local trades councils. These local societies grew quickly. In 1890 there were approximately 12 provincial societies.[53] In 1891 there were Fabian Societies in Belfast, Birmingham, Bombay, Bristol, Huddersfield, Hyde, Leeds, Manchester, Oldham, Plymouth,

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[52] As Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol note, the provincial Fabian Societies were "more closely linked to the efforts to organize the British working class". See Rueschemeyer and Skocpol, States, p. 127.

[53] David Kynaston, King Labour: The British Working Class, 1850-1914, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1976), p. 131.

Tyneside, Wolverhampton, and Hanley.[54] In 1892 Fabian membership increased from approximately 660 to 1770 due to the establishment of 26 provincial Fabian Societies.[55] By January of 1893 there were 72 localities with provincial Fabian Societies.[56] These provincial societies were essentially autonomous from the London Fabian Society. Although they swore adherence to the London Fabian Society's Basis, the provincial Fabians were strong advocates of independent political action, not permeation.

A joint meeting in Essex Hall on the 6th and 7th of February, 1892 between the London Fabian Society and participating provincial Fabian Societies, amply displays how different the provincial offspring were from their London parent society. Commenting on this conference in the Workman's Times, both "Autolycus" and "Proletarian" listed as the chief feature of the local societies a desire for an independent labour party. Autolycus, for instance, commented that it was impossible to listen to the statements of the provincial Fabian delegates without noticing that there was a general movement in the provinces "in the direction of vigorous action independent of the local, Liberal organizations...".[57] Proletarian further commented that, in particular, both the Manchester and Bradford Fabians "told us of a feeling up north to boycott any man who held an official

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[54] Workman's Times, 31 July, 1891, p. 8.

[55] Ibid., 21 May 1892, p. 8.

[56] David Kynaston, King Labour, p. 131.

[57] Workman's Times, 13 February, 1892, p. 1.

position in the Liberal Party".[58]

This provincial attitude was decidedly different from the opinions radiating from the London Fabian Society. Based in London, metropolitan in outlook, the Fabians overlooked the importance of the provincial societies' closer ties with the opinions of the working class. As A.M. McBriar notes, much of the "coolness and distrust" displayed by the London Fabian Society for the "independent movement may partly be explained by the degree to which their interest was engrossed by the politics of London".[59] In London, as E.R. Pease noted, the Liberal and Radical associations, which were typically the targets of the Fabians' permeation tactics, had a political importance in the 1880s and early 1890s, that they just did not have in the other provinces.[60] In the industrial towns of the north the importance of a Liberal radical association was "less common and there was

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[58] Ibid.

[59] McBriar, Fabian Socialism, p. 248.

[60] E.R. Pease, History, p. 108. It should be noted here that the importance of Radical and Liberal workmen associations in London was to lessen during the mid-1890s as the artisan trades began to disappear from London. James Hinton explains why the artisan class declined and the indirect effect this would have had on the London Fabian Society. Hinton states that the decline of artisan trades in the 1890s was accelerated owing to the competition from factory production in the provinces and sweated workshops in London. Encouraged further by the availability of cheap workmen's trains many artisans left London and migrated to the suburbs. With this loss of the artisan trades permeation "became increasingly irrelevant to working class politics, even in London". The artisans had provided the "social base for club radicalism". For additional information see James Hinton, Labour and Socialism: A History of the British Labour Movement, 1867-1974, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983), pp. 55, 56.

consequently less scope for permeation tactics".[61] In London, moreover, there was a lack of cohesion among workingmen as contrasted with those of Manchester, Bradford and other provincial towns.[62] As Paul Thompson explains, London with its rarity of large factories, and its typical small-scale sweated trades, affected the working classes in two very important ways. Firstly, it lessened the possibilities of "working class solidarity and made union organization difficult". Secondly, the "instability of the London population, the distances travelled to work and the lack of strong local community feeling" retarded the extension of trade unionism outside of the workshop. London did not exhibit the same worker cohesion as towns where one trade, such as mining or textiles, dominated the community.[63]

Thus, the London Fabian Society did not uphold the same opinions as their provincial offspring. This fact may help to explain why Friedrich Engels predicted that almost five-sixths of the provincial Fabian organizations were antagonistic towards the Fabians' London Executive.[64] Indeed, Philip Poirier believes the impatience the provincial Fabians felt for the policies of the London Fabians was best demonstrated by the decision on the part

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[61] Donald Read, The English Provinces, 1760-1960: A Study in Influence, (London: Edward Arnold Pub. Ltd., 1964), p. 194.

[62] Philip Poirier, The Advent, p. 48.

[63] Paul Thompson, Socialists, p. 39.

[64] Friedrich Engels to F.A. Sorge, 18 January, 1893 as cited in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels on Britain, second edition, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), p. 579.

of most provincial Fabians to merge with the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in 1893.[65] Perhaps, the provincial working men, who made up the local Fabian Societies, had simply become fed up with the "front bench" Fabians' "academic mirth and cock of the walk" habits.[66] For the London Fabian society had largely ignored the opinions and workings of their provincial societies.

Instead of treating their provincial members as "the finest testimony possible to the activity and growing influence of the Fabian Society",[67] as the way of the future, the London Fabians maintained a "somewhat detached attitude" towards its provincial branches. Indeed, the Fabians did not even attempt to dissuade their provincial branches from joining the ILP.[68] For example, the Fabian News simply reported which societies had merged with the ILP. No regret was expressed over their desertion.[69] G.D.H.

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[65] Philip Poirier, The Advent, p. 35. The ILP was founded at the Bradford Labour Institute on 13 January 1893. There were 115 delegates, 91 from local labour groups, 11 Fabian groups (9 of which were provincial societies), and 4 SDF branches. The geographical pattern of who joined the ILP is very revealing. Delegates came chiefly from the North of England. There were representatives from Scotland. There were no representatives from Wales, or Ireland and only 3 towns in southern England were represented: London, Chatham and Plymouth. For further information see Donald Read, The English Provinces, pp. 193-197.

[66] Workman's Times, 21 May, 1892, p. 8.

[67] Ibid., 13 February, 1892. This statement was made by Autolycus.

[68] E.R. Pease, History, p. 102.

[69] For example see Fabian News, December, 1893 and February, 1894. By 1900 only 4 provincial Fabian Societies, and 4 university Fabian societies, numbering approximately 240 persons in total, remained. D. Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol, States, p. 127.

Cole believes the leading Fabians may even have felt relief at their desertion. They were relieved because they could once again "pursue their policy of permeation" and collaboration with the Liberal Progressives on the LCC without provincial criticism.[70]

The Fabians also proved unsuited to the task of leading any working-class movement in the industrial districts by dismissing as unimportant the very men who would lead in the foundation of the LRC. For example, Bernard Shaw, in a letter to Sidney Webb dated 12 August, 1892, described the abilities of Keir Hardie. In Shaw's estimation, Hardie was "a Scotchman with alternate intervals of second sight (during which he does not see anything, but is suffused with afflictions) and common incapacity".[71] In 1896 Beatrice Webb noted that the leading Fabians were opposed to some of Ramsay MacDonald's ideas on policy.[72] They saw in John Burns a better leader for any labour movement. Moreover, Beatrice Webb described the entire labour movement in the following words:

> The Labour men are mere babies in politics;
> judging from our knowledge of the Labour movement
> we can expect no leader from the working-class.

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[70] G.D.H. Cole, A History of Socialist Thought, Vol. III, Part I, The Second International: 1889-1914, (London, MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1960), p. 128.

[71] Bernard Shaw, Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters, p. 360. Beatrice Webb, similarly, depicted Hardie as being interested in forming his own policy as it was the "only one" he could "boss". See Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership, p. 122. As McBriar notes, "Hardie's type of personality was antipathetic" to the Webbs. McBriar, Fabian Socialism, p. 295.

[72] Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership, p. 132. For further information on the relationship between Ramsay MacDonald and the Fabian Society, a good source is David Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977), especially pp. 41-44.

> Our only hope is in permeating the young middle-class man - catching them for collectivism before they enlisted on the other side.[73]

By belittling the abilities of the working class and relying on the permeation of already established organizations the Fabians were, in effect, refusing to acknowledge that the "immediate future of Socialism lay in the industrial north".[74] This meant they missed the opportunity to shape the labour movement during the 1890s.

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[73] Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership, p. 125.

[74] David Kynaston, King Labour, p. 131.

Chapter Five

Fabian Manifesto

"To Your Tents Oh Israel"

On 1 November, 1893 the Fabian Society presented the Fortnightly Review with a Manifesto entitled "To Your Tents Oh Israel". The presentation of this article provides another chapter of controversy concerning Fabian attitudes toward independent labour representation and offers an excellent opportunity to study Fabians' attitudes towards the working class. The Manifesto thrust the Fabian Society directly into the 1890s' debate over the feasibility of a working-class labour party in parliament. Both Fabian contemporaries and later historians spent considerable amounts of time theorizing as to why the Fabian Society wrote the Manifesto. Unlike John Burns, who was invited by Shaw on 22 February, 1894 to learn "the sort of calculation" on which he and Webb "ventured the Fabian Manifesto",[1] Fabian contemporaries were left to sift for clues through the Manifesto and the various reactions to it by persons such as Beatrice Webb, H.W. Massingham, Michael Davitt, and "Autolycus". As historian H.V. Emy states, the Fabians' Manifesto was not just to "be taken at face value".[2]

Puzzlement over the Manifesto manifested itself both inside and outside of the Fabian Society.[3] For, as D.H. Laurence states, the "practical proposals for labour representation" contained in

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[1] G.B. Shaw, Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters, 1874-1897, vol. 1, edited by D.H. Laurence, (London: Max Reinhardt, 1965), p. 377.

[2] H.V. Emy, Liberals, Radicals, and Social Politics, (Cambridge: Cambridge at the University Press, 1973), p. 62.

[3] Pugh, Educate, p. 49.

the Manifesto made it "one of the most controversial documents ever published by the Society".[4] As the previous chapters of this thesis related, the Fabians had historically never given much encouragement to any attempts being made to found an independent labour party of the working class. The Fabians' usual tactics involved the policy of permeation and the attempt to shape social policy through elites and already established political parties. As Paul Thompson states, traditionally the Fabians had found "little hope for the future through the working class".[5] Thus, the contents of the Fabians' Manifesto represented, in theory, a real break with previous official Fabian policies on independent labour representation. In other words the Manifesto marked "a significant shift in Fabian policy".[6] The question remains, was it a real break and did it signify a lasting change in Fabian attitudes towards the working class?

This chapter will attempt to answer the above question by providing an overview of the Fabian Manifesto. It will estimate who would have read the Manifesto, and most importantly, discuss the reactions of Socialist, Liberal, and Labour contemporaries to the Fabians' Manifesto. The final section of this chapter will attempt to provide some coherence to the many responses the Manifesto provoked. For example, reactions by members of the ILP will be studied in an attempt to illustrate that, first of all,

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[4] G.B. Shaw, Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters, p. 419.

[5] Thompson, Socialists, p. 138.

[6] Poirier, The Advent, p. 34.

the Fabian policy towards independent labour representation, prior to the publication of the Manifesto was very sparse. The Fabian Society had never really overtly supported the struggle for the independent labour representation which culminated in the foundation of the LRC. Secondly, the surprised reactions to the Fabians' attempt to spearhead the labour movement, to dictate any labour party policy, suggest that prior Fabian policy was next to non-existent, and that labour enthusiasts had by the time of the Manifesto stopped waiting for the Fabian Society to lead the way. Essentially in the eyes of their fellow socialists, the Fabians had for too long betrayed the struggle for independent labour representation. They could not simply write a bit of literary work and then propose to be spearheading the struggle for independent labour representation.

The Fabian Manifesto "To Your Tents Oh Israel" originated in September of 1893 when the Fabian Executive asked Bernard Shaw to compose a manifesto. It should be noted here that there was some controversy over who initiated and who wrote the Manifesto. Fred Hammill, an ardent supporter of the ILP as well as a member of the Fabian Executive from 1892 to 1895, first prompted the Fabian Executive to prepare the manifesto.[7] Shaw's diary shows that he

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[7] Ibid., p. 33. A debate over the issue of Fred Hammill's influence or lack thereof in initiating the Manifesto took place between Sidney Dark and Halliday Sparling. Dark claimed the position advanced in the Fortnightly Review was "exactly" Hammill's. Dark stated that the whole Manifesto was written with "an eye on Fred Hammill and Newcastle". Dark claimed he gained this idea straight "from a man very much in the confidence of the authors of the Manifesto". See Workman's Times, 18 November, 1893, p. 1, and Workman's Times, 2 December, 1893. Halliday

began a manifesto on 19 September, 1893.[8] And Beatrice Webb described the Manifesto as "Shaw's reproduction of Sidney's facts".[9] Indeed, the Manifesto was the work of both Bernard Shaw and Sidney Webb. Yet, as it was Fabian policy at that time to issue proofs of tracts to its members for criticism prior to publication, the Manifesto was presented for revisions on two occasions and signed as having been written by "the Fabian Society".[10]

The Fabian Manifesto began by announcing that the Fabian Society had "come to the end of its patience with Liberal Ministers". The Manifesto related what it termed the "secret history" of Fabian efforts from 1886 to 1892 to improve the Liberal Party by encouraging the radical collectivist wing of the

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Sparling disagreed with Dark. Sparling stated: "I fancy that Fred Hammill will be quite as much surprised as the rest of his colleagues" when he finds out that the Fabian Society initiated "a new policy" simply to suit his needs. See Workman's Times, 25 November, 1893, p. 1.

[8] G.B. Shaw, The Diaries, 1885-1897, vol. II, edited and annotated by Stanley Weintraub, (London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986), p. 969.

[9] Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership, p. 110.

[10] G.B. Shaw, The Diaries, p. 975. Shaw's diary entries note that on 11 October, 1893 a "Fabian Special Executive" meeting was held to discuss the Manifesto. The Fabian Society's Minute books show that Bland chaired the meeting. In attendance were W.S. De Mattos, H.H. Sparling, Fred Hammill, Emma Brooke, Sidney Webb, E.R. Pease and G.B. Shaw. (Absent were Mary Cameron, W.H. Utely, J.F. Oakeshoot, Graham Wallas, E.E. Williams, George Standring and Sydney Olivier). See Fabian Society Minute Books, 1884-1918, microfiche edition, (Harvester Press Ltd., 1975). On 13 October, 1893, the Manifesto was again discussed, at Bernard's Inn, during a general members' meeting.

Liberal organization at the expense of the Gladstonian Whigs.[11] In an attempt to do so, the Fabians believed they had "fobbed" onto the Liberal Party the so called Newcastle Programme of 1891.[12] The Newcastle Programme was a political platform which, according to the Fabians, outlined basic progressive demands. It called for the Disestablishment and Disendowment of the Church of England in Wales, Home Rule for Ireland, full municipal powers for the LCC and other municipalities, taxation of ground values, free schools, one man one vote, shorter parliaments, the extension of the Factory Acts, payment of members, payment of election expenses, the "mending or ending" of the House of Lords and so on.[13]

It was owing to the Newcastle Programme that the Fabian Society believed that the Liberals won the 1892 general election. In fact, the Fabians claimed the Newcastle Programme won 12 seats in London alone for the Liberal Party. According to the Fabians, Liberal candidates who confined their political promises only to Home Rule and Disestablishment made no headway in 1892. As the

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[11] The Fabian Society,"To Your Tents Oh Israel!", Fortnightly Review, vol. 54, (1 November, 1893), [hereafter, "Manifesto"], p. 569.

[12] G.B. Shaw, ed. Fabian Essays, "Sixty Years of Fabianism", a postscript by Bernard Shaw written in 1947, p. 208. The National Liberal Federation accepted the Newcastle Programme at their 14th annual meeting held at Newcastle-on-Tyne in October of 1891.

[13] The Liberal Party's Newcastle Programme, Liberal Leaflet No. I. 589, 1892, was reproduced in full in Fabian tract 49, "A Plan for the Campaign of Labour", (London: Fabian Society, 1894), p. 14.

Manifesto stated, by "solely committing themselves to progressivism" the Liberal Party won the 1892 election.[14] Bernard Shaw, at the age of 90 years still explained it thus:

> But as the Liberal Party were facing a General Election with nothing to offer the electorate beyond what the most backward Conservatives were offering except Home Rule for Ireland, and the Fabians knew that the dumb masses of the British electorate did not care a dump for Ireland, the Newcastle Programme caught on irresistibly. Candidates in all directions scrapped their Home Rule election literature and sent frantically for Fabian tracts...And the Liberals won the election.[15]

Yet, as the Fabians' Manifesto explained, the Liberal ministers' adherence to the Newcastle Programme and their promise to be a "fair house" "vanished on the morrow of the general election".[16] In fact, sixteen months after the Liberals came to power the Fabians charged that Liberal electoral promises were not being carried out. The Fabians' evidence was based mainly on their criticism of the Liberals' administrative reforms. They knew that it was not possible for the Liberal ministers to pass massive amounts of legislative reforms. Possessing only a narrow

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[14] Fabian Society, "Manifesto", pp. 572, 573.

[15] G.B. Shaw, ed. Fabian Essays, "Sixty Years of Fabianism", a postscript written by Bernard Shaw in 1947, pp. 208-209. It should be noted here that A.M. McBriar is of the opinion that Fabian claims to have originated the Newcastle Programme are more than a little exaggerated. As McBriar notes, every item in the Newcastle Programme had already been adopted by the National Liberal Federation at its annual meetings in 1889 and 1890. See McBriar, Fabian Socialism, p. 238.

[16] Fabian Society, Manifesto, p. 573. The term "fair house" was defined by the Fabians as one that would pay trade union rates, prohibit overtime and uphold the eight hour day. The opposite of the fair house was the "rat house", one that paid starvation wages and maintained sweaters' hours.

majority and spending much of their energy and time on the issue of Irish Home Rule, the Liberal ministers could be forgiven for their lack of legislative changes. What the Fabians could not forgive and what they were highly critical of in their Manifesto was the lack of administrative reforms carried out since the 1892 general election. These, as they did not require the sanction of parliament, could have been carried out. Neither the excuse of a lack of time, nor Tory obstruction, nor even the House of Lords could have blocked them.[17]

The Manifesto applied the considerable scrutinizing power of the Fabian Society to various government offices and found many wanting. For example, the Fabian Manifesto specifically criticized the shortcomings of the Post Office under Arnold Morely, the Public Works under G.J. Shaw-Lefevre, and the War Office under Campbell Bannerman.[18] In a more general sense the Manifesto also outlined what the Fabians took to be the four main obstacles hampering and largely preventing the Progressive wing of the Liberal party from fulfilling their Newcastle Programme promises.[19] The first obstruction was seen as Gladstone's

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[17] Ibid., p. 572.

[18] Ibid., pp. 574-575.

[19] The Progressive Liberal ministers, according to the Manifesto, were lead by H.H. Asquith and A.H.D. Acland: and included S.C. Buxton, Sir Edward Grey, R.B. Haldane, Lord Rosebery, Lord Ripon, Mundella, and J. Bryce. p. 582. Less likely to be permeated were Liberals such as Gladstone and John Morley. Indeed, Peter Clarke claims that the name of John Morley, along with those of Herbert Spencer, and Leonard Courtney was held up as a by-word for individualism in Fabian circles. Peter Clarke, Liberals and Social Democrats, (Cambridge: Cambridge

complete absorption in Irish Home Rule. Reforms were being prevented by the Gladstonian formula of "Ireland blocks the way".[20] The second obstacle was the active hostility of reactionary Whigs like Sir William Harcourt. Harcourt and his budget were judged by the Fabians as having discredited Liberalism with everyone whose income was less that 500 pounds.[21] The third obstacle listed was John Morley's Manchesterian doctrines and pettish temper. Finally, the Whig peers' "ignorance, indifference and inertia" posed as part of the dilemma for more progressive ministers.[22]

The Fabian Manifesto believed there were two steps needed to end these obstacles. The first was to realize the unfaithfulness of the Liberal Party towards their election promises. The Fabian Manifesto claimed that the Fabian Society had always been aware that the Liberal Party would use and then reject the Newcastle Programme as soon as it was elected. As the Manifesto stated, the Fabian Society was in a position to prove that it was "too wise before the event to be among the dupes" who had believed the

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University Press, 1952), p. 42.

[20] Justice, 4 November, 1893, p. 6.

[21] Fabian Society, "Manifesto", p. 579. H.W. Massingham lists the four bills and sixteen administrative works the Fabians admitted the Liberal Government did carry out. See H.W. Massingham, "The Government and Labour", The Contemporary Review, Vol. LXIV, (December, 1893), pp. 768-770.

[22] Ibid., p. 582.

Liberal Party was sincere in its 1892 election promises.[23] The proofs the Fabians offered were the various editions of the 1887 "Workers Political Programme", Hubert Bland's essay entitled "The Outlook" in the 1889 Fabian Essays, and the "Fabian Election Manifesto" in 1892.[24]

The second step towards ending the obstacles encountered with the present Liberal government involved the realization that, since the Liberal party could not be trusted to keep their progressive promises, the Reform Act of 1884 should be put to its proper use, and the trade union organization should provide a parliamentary fund of 30,000 pounds to advance 50 independent Labour candidates at the next general election.[25] The Fabian Society believed the trade unions should organize a concentrated effort to bring order to the struggle for an independent labour movement as trade unions, with their "superior fitness for political work", were the only organizations able to do so. The Fabians believed that because there was no "completely effective

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[23] Fabian Society, Manifesto, p. 585. "Autolycus" was particularly infuriated by this statement in the Manifesto. He claimed it was a "passage...which ought to be eternally remembered against the Fabians" and questioned whether the Fabians were really "wise before the event" or whether their Manifesto was merely a vulgar case of the Fabians being "wise after the event". Workman's Times, 11 November, 1893, p. 1.

[24] Fabian Society, "Manifesto", p. 585. It is interesting to note that in 1906 the Fabian Executive still held that the Fabians had foreseen that the Liberals would abandon the Newcastle Programme. "Our plan was to use their disregard of the Programme and their breach of its pledges to Labour, as proof of the need for an Independent Labour Party". See Margaret Cole, The Webbs and Their Work, p. 12.

[25] Fabian Society, "Manifesto", pp. 587, 586.

and general organization of the working class" the trade unions, acting through the Trades Councils, should foot the bill.[26] The Fabians held that Socialist societies such as the SDF and the ILP should relegate their future activities to propaganda work and the recommending of candidates to the Trades Councils for selection. In other words, Socialist societies should be actively agitating the rank and file members of the working class, to support trades union leaders. The Fabian Society concluded the Manifesto by promising to provide the world of labour and the working class with a more detailed plan for a properly organized labour party in the near future.[27]

This was Fabian tract 49, "A Plan for the Campaign of Labour", published in January of 1894. It incorporated the Manifesto into part one of the tract and in part two provided what it termed "constructive proposals". These proposals were a type of guideline for the formation of a British labour party. For example, the tract summarized the conditions the Fabians felt were necessary prerequisites for the establishment of any Labour party. The "indispensable requirements" for Labour candidature were as follows: a compact industrial constituency, the support of the organized trades, a requisition for the Labour candidate, signed by at least one thousand voters, an election fund

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[26] Ibid., p. 588. In London there should be established separate constituency organizations which the Trades Council could then co-ordinate. See also Fabian Tract 49, pp. 24-26, and McBriar, Fabian Socialism, p. 251.

[27] Fabian Society, "Manifesto", p. 589. See also, A.M. McBriar, Fabian Socialism, p. 251.

sufficient to insure the Returning Officer's expenses, and finally a candidate, most likely a Socialist or collectivist radical, who could not only conciliate all sections of working class opinion, but receive financial support from one of the larger unions.[28] As Margaret Cole states, tract 49 provided the "most precise plan for an independent Labour Party financed by Trade Unions" that the labour world had yet seen.[29]
But just who was seeing this Manifesto and tract?

While it is hard to estimate the extent to which the Fabian Manifesto was read, a letter by Sidney Webb to E.R. Pease suggests to whom the Fabians mailed copies. Tract 49 was to be sent to the General Purpose Committee of the National Liberal Federation, to the hundred trades councils, to the secretaries of both the ILP and the SDF branches, to the seventeen cabinet ministers, and to the approximately 350 Liberal and Labour members of parliament.[30] As it was published in the Fortnightly Review it would have come to the attention of those readers who could afford a half crown magazine. As Fabian tract 49 it became far more accessible to those of a lesser income in the form of a penny tract.[31]

As the Manifesto and tract were read by people different

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[28] G.B. Shaw, "A Plan of Campaign for Labour", Tract 49, (London: Fabian Society, 1894), pp. 32-33.

[29] Margaret Cole, The Story, p. 148.

[30] Sidney Webb to E.R. Pease 11 January, 1894, The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, vol. ii, p. 12.

[31] Justice, 4 November, 1893, p. 6.

estimations as to Fabian motives and different reactions to the Manifesto began to be bandied about. Beatrice Webb, who by 25 December, 1893 remained unsure of whether she altogether approved of it, provides two reasons as to why it was published. The first reason was that the Fabians were truly fed up with the Gladstonian Liberal Party's continual resistance to progressive collectivist reforms and felt the time was right to voice their opinions. As she put it, Sidney Webb and Bernard Shaw's Manifesto only "spoke to the world exactly what they had been saying in private".[32] This reasoning depends on two notions: first, that the Fabian Society was sincerely upset by the Liberals' refusal to put the Newcastle Programme into full effect, and second, that the Fabian Society truly believed the clauses passed at the annual conference of the TUC in September of 1893 would be carried out.

At the Belfast conference of the TUC, in 1893, 380 delegates representing 900,000 trade unions had decided that a separate fund should be "established for the purpose of assisting independent Labour candidates in local and parliamentary elections".[33] A.M. McBriar claims this decision of the TUC was the "main reason" why Shaw and Webb published the Manifesto.

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[32] Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership, p. 110. Friedrich Engels gave this view a somewhat different slant when he defined the Manifesto as a "complete confession of sins committed by these overweening bourgeois". See Engels to F.A. Sorge, 11 November, 1893, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels on Britain, p. 580.

[33] Fred Hammill, "Labour Representation", Fortnightly Review, vol. 55, (April, 1894), p. 549.

McBriar believes the Webbs' on-going research into trade unionism had taught the Fabians that trade unions had a responsibility to the British labour movement.[34] In fact, though the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC had been consistently hostile towards socialist attempts to encourage trade unions to support parliamentary candidates financially, the Webb's History of Trade Unionism does relate that in 1893 the Fabians believed the socialists had gained the upper hand in the TUC.[35]

Many people disagreed with Beatrice Webb's first argument that what the Fabians wrote in their Manifesto was sincere. A good illustration of this is the view held by both H.W. Massingham and Michael Davitt. Massingham and Davitt were both of the opinion that there was nothing sincere in the Fabians' attack on the Liberal Party and that the only possible victor in the whole situation was the Tory Party. Massingham, the political editor of the Daily Chronicle, was so infuriated by the Manifesto that he resigned from the Fabian Society.[36] In an article for the Contemporary Review he described the Manifesto as a piece of pure

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[34] McBriar, Fabian Socialism, p. 251.

[35] Sidney and Beatrice Webb, History of Trade Unionism, pp. 374-375.

[36] Fabian Society Minute Books: 1884-1918, 20 October, 1893. In all seven Fabians resigned over the publication of the Manifesto. One of these members was the political theorist and author of Darwinism and Politics, D.G. Ritchie. It should be noted here, however, that Ritchie, after his resignation, claimed that he had been elected to the Fabian Society without his knowledge and without having signed the Basis of the Fabian Society. See Sandra M. Den Otter, British Idealism and Social Explanation: A Study in Late Victorian Thought, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 114-115.

"mischief making".[37] It was a "retrogression...from every political principle" that the Fabians had upheld.[38] Its appeal to trade unionism was "absurd and ill timed". To Massingham the notion that the trade unions would support socialist candidates went against every tendency of the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC. The Parliamentary Committee could be counted on to agitate for the payment of MPs, not to provide an electoral fund for socialist candidates. Moreover, Massingham was of the opinion that until the payment of MPs was established in Britain the only sure effect an increase in independent labour candidatures would have was to build up any future Tory Government.[39] Michael Davitt expressed a similar, and somewhat blunter, opinion: the end and aim of the Manifesto was not to smooth the way for a labour party but to "pave the way for the advent of Mr. Chamberlain and the unionists to power".[40]

Another theory which objected to Beatrice Webb's first argument that the Fabian Society was sincerely fed up with the Liberal Party, was the notion that the Manifesto did not

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[37] H.W. Massingham, "The Government and Labour", Contemporary Review, vol. LXIV, (December, 1893), p. 772.

[38] Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership, p. 114.

[39] H.W. Massingham, "The Government and Labour", Contemporary Review, vol. LXVI, (December, 1893), p. 766.

[40] Michael Davitt, "Fabian Fustian", Nineteenth Century, vol. 34 (1893), p. 854. It should be noted that Sidney Webb during an interview entitled "A Fabian Conservative Alliance?" directly denied the charge that the Manifesto was written "out of...friendship for the Tory Party". See Sidney Webb, Pall Mall Gazette, 2 November, 1893, p. 3.

represent a break with the Fabians' policy of permeation. Instead the Manifesto could very well be viewed as just another form of permeation in which the Fabian Society, through the threat of a third political party, attempted to bully and coerce the Liberal Party into becoming more collectivist. In other words, the Manifesto was a "pure bluff, every word of it".[41]

There can be no doubt that some of the Fabians' contemporaries viewed the Manifesto as an attempt to threaten the Liberal Party into change. Autolycus, in the Workman's Times, maintains that he had heard rumours that the Fabians' Manifesto was "only intended as a goad to drive the Liberal Party into passing the Newcastle Programme".[42] A.M. McBriar believes this theory, stating that as early as "Wanted a Programme: An Appeal to the Liberal Party", Sidney Webb had recognized that it was the threat of the formation of a third party which would push the Liberals to a more Radical policy.[43]

Indeed, statements made especially by Sidney Webb appear to support this theory. For example, in a section of an article entitled "What Mr. Gladstone Ought to Do", Webb noted that for "the Government at this moment the fear of the Labour Party" was

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[41] Workman's Times 11 November, 1893, p. 3. The Scotsman, also held that the Fabian Society was bluffing. See the Scotsman, 30 October, 1893, p. 6.

[42] Workman's Times, 11 November, 1893, p. 1.

[43] In fact, McBriar holds that "Fabian propaganda was based on that assumption". McBriar, Fabian Socialism, p. 240. Philip Poirier likewise states that in 1889 Webb had little doubt that the Liberal Party would choose to become the Labour Party rather than be superseded. See Poirier, The Advent, p. 30.

"the beginning of wisdom".[44] Later during an interview with the Pall Mall Gazette Webb insisted that the Fabians had carefully chosen the time in which to write and publish the Manifesto.[45] This was to allow the Liberal Cabinet the opportunity to "take all the sting" out of the Manifesto. Webb claimed that the Fabians had deliberately not added to the Manifesto any proposal which could not "be carried out within the current year". When the interviewer asked if the Manifesto was then to be seen as "a pistol held to the head of the Government", Webb replied that the Liberal Government should recognize that "the issue of a manifesto of this kind at this date is really doing them a service".[46] Even if the Manifesto failed to reform the Liberal Party Webb believed that it would create a split in the Liberal party, and cause it to be reconstituted on "a frankly collectivist basis".[47]

The second reason Beatrice Webb ascribes to the Fabians for writing the Manifesto was the notion that, as Graham Wallas had suggested, they were "rushed into it by fear of being thought

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[44] Sidney Webb, "What Mr. Gladstone Ought to Do", Fortnightly Review, vol. 53, (February, 1893), p. 282.

[45] As the Fabian News noted, the Manifesto had been "timed to appear simultaneously with the beginning of the winter session of Parliament, and placed in one of the leading reviews so as to force it upon the notice of the Government, which cannot be reached by penny Tracts". See Fabian News, November, 1893.

[46] Sidney Webb, The Pall Mall Gazette, 02 November, 1893, p. 3.

[47] Sidney Webb, "What Mr. Gladstone Ought to Do", Fortnightly Review, vol. 53, (February, 1893), p. 287.

complacent and apathetic by the ILP".[48] The Fabian Society had never been very supportive of the ILP. Right from the inception of the ILP in Bradford, in January of 1893, the Fabians tended to be very aloof and critical of the infant organization. For example, the Fabian Society only agreed to send two delegates (Bernard Shaw and W.S. De Mattos) to the founding conference of the ILP on the guaranteed understanding that it would in no way identify the Fabian Society with the ILP.[49] Moreover, a letter Shaw sent to E.R. Pease two days before the ILP conference displayed his disagreement with the ILP's more independent labour policies. In his letter Shaw told Pease of his intention to attend the ILP conference and "to go uncompromisingly for permeation". Shaw stated that he felt like "forcing a fight as extravagantly as possible, so as to make it clear to all the new men that the Fabian" was "the lead for them to follow...".[50] The

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[48] Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership, p. 110. Tangled with this theory is the assumption that the Fabians were worried about being labelled as just another part of the Liberal Party. Indeed, Engels who believed the Fabians were "up to their necks in the intrigues of the Liberal Party", described the Fabian Society as the "tail of the great Liberal Party". See Engels to Karl Kautsky, 12 August, 1893, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels on Britain, pp. 575, 576. Norman Mackenzie also believes Shaw felt the initiative was slipping away from the Fabians as they were being dismissed as mere hangers on to the Liberal Party. Mackenzie, ed. Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, vol. II, p. 91.

[49] A reproduction of the letter E.R. Pease sent to the ILP may be found in the Workman's Times, 14 January, 1893, p. 2.

[50] G.B. Shaw in a letter to E.R. Pease, dated 11 January, 1893, Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters, p. 377. In fact, De Mattos and Shaw were very nearly not permitted to join in the founding conference of the ILP. Donald Read claims this may have been done "as a protest against the lukewarm attitude of the Fabians to

Fabian Manifesto, therefore, not surprisingly relegated the ILP to a mere propaganda role in the formation of a future labour party. By 12 March, 1895 Beatrice Webb was still depicting the ILP as lacking in "money, brains, and to some extent, moral characteristics".[51]

As may be discerned then, some ILP members were quite surprised and others angered by the appearance of the Fabians' Manifesto. Autolycus believed the Fabian Society was jealous of the ILP's success in capturing the leadership of the struggle for independent labour representation. He held that the Manifesto was a complete recantation of Fabian permeation and an "unqualified confession" that the ILP's independent policy was correct. In fact, Autolycus dubbed the Fabians "tardy" and suspect converts to the policy of independent labour representation.[52] The Manifesto to Autolycus was nothing more than a "weathercock" in that it indicated only which way the wind was blowing (which the ILP had already been well aware of). To make his point clearer Autolycus subsequently stated,

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independent tactics". See Donald Read, The English Provinces, p. 196.

[51] Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership, p. 117. David Howell explains why some of the tensions between the Fabian Society and the ILP existed. He claims there was one fundamental distinction between the two groups. The ILP sought influence and power on the basis of a separate party organization. The Fabian Society sought influence by "concentrating on the intellectual consent of arrived or aspiring politicians". David Howell, British Workers and the Independent Labour Party: 1888-1906, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1983), p. 10.

[52] Workman's Times, 11 November, 1893, p. 1.

> The movement in favour of Independent Labour representation owes nothing to the Fabian Society, and now that it is growing so rapidly the Fabian Society, who have hitherto always discouraged it, cannot be permitted to usurp the place of power on the strength of such an unsound piece of special pleading as is contained in this precious manifesto.[53]

Sidney E. Dark agreed. He stated that the day when the Fabians could initiate political policies was "absolutely played out". The Fabians were behind the times. They had lost their chance to join honestly the struggle for independent labour representation when they had failed to support the ILP.[54]

As may be discerned then, many people displayed both disbelief and distrust of the Fabian Society's apparent adoption of independent labour movement tactics. There is no doubt that no one, except perhaps the Fabian Society itself, believed the statement that the Fabians had foreseen that the Liberal Party would betray the Newcastle Programme and thus had planned accordingly to use the incident as proof for the need of an Independent Labour Party. Most believed the Fabians had simply realized that the spirit of the times was leaning towards independent labour representation. Indeed, perhaps Autolycus spoke truest when he warned the members of the ILP not to go into raptures over the Fabian Manifesto- until they saw that it was followed up by action.[55] For even if the Manifesto were to be

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[53] Ibid., 25 November, 1893, p. 1.

[54] Ibid., 18 November, 1893, p. 1.

[55] Ibid., 11 November, 1893, p. 1.

taken at face value, in the final analysis the Fabians did not follow it up by diligently supporting the movement for independent tactics. They certainly did not whole-heartedly join the ILP in its effort to increase working-class representation. Instead, within a year of the Manifesto, the Fabian Society retreated back to a policy of permeation with the Rosebery Liberals.

Perhaps the Fabians' turning back towards permeation, after the TUC's failure to provide financial support to socialist candidates, was indicative of the Fabians' failure to believe that the working class could form and maintain their own political party. Tract 49 still noted that the working classes were apathetic and that they still had done absolutely nothing with the Reform Bill of 1884. Conveniently ignoring the establishment of the ILP in 1893, Tract 49 berated them for having wasted another two years doing nothing to improve their lot.[56] The Fabians still failed to see that the character of Britain's future labour movement lay more in the actions of the ILP and the local Fabian Societies that had joined the ILP than in their own policy of permeation.

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[56] Pugh, Educate, p. 47.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

On 27 April, 1892, during a debate in the House of Commons on the possibilities of providing women with the right to vote, Samuel Smith, MP from Flintshire, worried that the programme of the Fabian Society "would have immense charms for millions of sempstresses, factory girls, domestic servants, and workingmen's wives".[1] Yet we know from our earlier examination of the Fabians' social composition in chapter two that workers neither enthusiastically supported nor joined the London Fabian Society. Similarly, it may be stated that the Fabian Society far from overtly supporting the struggle for independent labour representation in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, often displayed more interest in reforming the already established parties and politicians. As this thesis has attempted to explain, the Fabians' tendency towards the policy of permeation derived somewhat from the Fabians' low opinion of the "average sensual man". The Fabians' lack of interest in the working class, outside of the more institutional labour movement, and outside of London politics, ensured that the Fabian Society operated largely apart from the growing alliance between the socialists of the ILP located in the north and the trade unionists that was to develop into the future Labour Party.

Moreover, the Fabians' sense of disillusionment with the working classes grew as the 1900s progressed. As Chris Waters notes, socialists, increasingly isolated from the realities of

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[1] Parliamentary Debates, Fourth Series, House of Commons Official Report, Vol. 3, (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1892), p. 1482.

working-class culture, often berated the "workers even more vociferously for the poverty of their imagination in the new century than they had in the 1880s and 1890s".[2] For example, in 1919 Sidney Webb described the majority of the people in Britain as "apathetic, dense, and unreceptive to any unfamiliar ideas". He concluded that it was useless to try to struggle "against their apathy and denseness". According to Webb, it made better sense to "work your government machine in some way that will enable you to get on notwithstanding their denseness".[3] Thus, the Fabian Society staked their hopes on an

> elite of unassuming experts who would make no claim to superior social status, but would content themselves with exercising the power inherent in superior knowledge and longer administrative experience.[4]

This way the Fabian Society could by-pass the apathy of the workers by stressing the importance of enlightened, professional representatives trained to act in the interest of the uninformed masses. The Fabians found it deplorable that a man could "sit in Parliament without any relevant qualifications". The Fabians held that without "qualified rulers" a Socialist state would be impossible.[5]

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[2] Waters, British Socialists, p. 176.

[3] Sidney Webb, "A Stratified Democracy", New Commonwealth, 28 November, 1919, p. 5 as found in Wright, G.D.H. Cole, p. 56.

[4] Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership, 18 January, 1897, p. 97.

[5] Pease, History, p. 283. This may seem entirely naive on the part of the Fabian Society to believe that representatives of the people would work not for material benefits, but for the

The Fabians' belief in qualified rulers, in the benefits of procuring an elite of disinterested experts was to some extent encouraged by the Fabians' own distrust and fear of the unenlightened masses. The Fabian Society believed "intelligent reformers", reformers who had grasped the principles of socialism, were always a rarity. This was especially true among the working classes. The Fabians held that the "dry details of legislative and administrative steps" could never be made intelligible or interesting to the ordinary voter.[6] Indeed, the Fabian Society was overly sensitive to the threat of placing "the organized, intelligent and class conscious Socialist minority at the mercy of the unorganized and apathetic mass of routine toilers".[7] As Sugwon Kang comments, the "vision of workers running their own affairs, unsupervised and unmeditated by their betters" did not appeal to the Fabian Society.[8] It has been an underlying notion of this thesis that the Fabians' fear of the masses aided in their failure to appreciate better the increasing alliance between the socialists of the ILP and trade unionists during the later part of the 1890s.

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benefit of knowing they were socially useful. As Michael Foot, the Labour Party leader in 1982 states, "Politicians live in little worlds of their own and imagine these are the universe". Apparently, the Fabian Society did too. Michael Foot, Another Heart and Other Pulse, (London: Collins, 1984), p. 33.

[6] G.B. Shaw, Fabian Tract 70, "Report on Fabian Policy and Resolutions", (London: Fabian Society, 1896), p. 13.

[7] Ibid., p. 14.

[8] Sugwon Kang, "Prophets of the Welfare State: British Liberalism after Gladstone", Polity, Vol. 14(4), 1982, p. 719.

Thus, the Fabian Society's claim to have strongly influenced the Labour Party is problematic for at least three reasons. Firstly, the Fabians never historically displayed much support for any of the attempts to form a labour party. As we have seen, even during an 1891 debate in the Workman's Times over the feasibility of founding a workers' political party the Fabians were extremely negative. The most the Fabians urged the workers to do was to "heckle" the already existing political parties. They believed this would be "the most effective means of impressing Parliament".[9] They did not believe the workers could organize or sustain their own independent political party.

Secondly, because Fabian attitudes towards the working classes were so visibly contemptuous it is hard to believe they placed much faith or hope in the inauguration of the LRC. As John Callaghan states, the Fabians from their earliest days displayed "an undisguised contempt for the working class".[10] For the Fabian Society the workers were the "raw material of Socialism": they were a material that needed to be better educated and politically more mature before they could ever form an efficient party in Parliament.[11] For this reason, the Fabians marginalized the importance of the local Fabian Societies, the importance of the

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[9] See Workman's Times, 4 June, 1892, p. 7, and Fabian Tract 11, "The Workers Political Programme", (London: Fabian Society, 1890), p. 12.

[10] Callaghan, Socialism in Britain, p. 35.

[11] G.B. Shaw, ed. Fabian Essays, p. 175.

ILP and the overall relevance of the increasing number of expressions against the policy of permeation reported in the Workman's Times. For example, as early as 13 February, 1892, "Proletarian" was defining permeation as the principle of "moralising the Liberal Party and other political parties in preference to a bold attempt to bring to life the greater Labour Party".[12]

Thirdly, and perhaps most obviously, it is next to impossible to claim that the rise of labour was due solely to the spread of socialist sentiments.[13] Yet, if the Fabian Society may be said to have had any influence on the formation of the future Labour Party, prior to 1900, it is more through the hard factual analysis they provided the rest of the labour movement in the form of Fabian Tracts and lectures. As Keir Hardie's Labour Leader remarked, the Fabians performed a "vast amount of economic and social research" and provided other socialists with a number of solid publications.[14] It is more through their diffusion of ideas about the modern welfare state that the Fabian Society may be said to have had an impact on the early labour movement. They were definitely not the catalyst behind the working

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[12] Workman's Times, 13 February, 1892, p. 1. Keir Hardie likewise depicted the policy of permeation as "simple operation" that actually harmed the working classes, because it demoralized workingmen. See Fabian News, February, 1895.

[13] For example see Marcel Van Der Linden and Jurgen Rojahn, Eds. The Formation of Labour Movements, 1870-1914: An International Perspective, (New York: E.J. Brill, 1990), p. 6.

[14] Labour Leader, 18 August, 1894, p. 14.

classes'struggle for political organization.[15]

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[15] See Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol, eds. States, pp. 132-133.

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