

PART III

PRACTICAL SOCIALISM

CHAPTER I

THE FIRST TWO HUNDRED

I. The Refugees

WHEN William Morris joined the Democratic Federation in January, 1883, the propaganda of Socialism in England had been under way for less than two years "Those who set out 'to make the revolution'", he recalled some years later,

"were a few working men, less successful even in the wretched life of labour than their fellows, a sprinkling of the intellectual proletariat one or two outsiders in the game political, a few refugees from the bureaucratic tyranny of foreign governments, and here and there an unpractical, half-cracked artist or author"¹

In the years between 1870 and 1880 (and even for ten years before 1870) no consistent Socialist propaganda—not even of a dozen or twenty members—had existed in Britain

Small bodies of Owenite "Socialists", it is true, could still be found up and down the country They were mostly aged survivors, with little influence, and several of their prominent leaders had allowed their theories to become involved with the quack "science" of phrenology This theory which, popularized by George Combe's work, *The Constitution of Man* (1828), had deeply impressed Richard Cobden, had won a small but ardent following among the working class in the mid-century, and still held a few adherents at the century's close The theory held that character could be diagnosed from the shape of the skull, and it was raised (especially by American exponents) to the status of a complex system of psychology False as its first principles were, it seemed to provide a natural rather than a theological explanation of human behaviour which attracted some radicals and secularists From phrenologists there came some of the frankest discussions of sexual questions published in mid-Victorian England Moreover, phrenology was felt to be a democratic science, since bumps were

¹ "Where are We Now", *Commonweal*, November 15th, 1890

no respecters of class divisions "In this republican land", wrote the Editor of the American Phrenological Journal, in a pamphlet published in Manchester,

"the talents of all her sons become *public property* The gifted have no *right* to deprive their fellow-citizens of the benefits of their capabilities To do so is robbery"¹

A sensible society would direct its sons into the occupations for which their bumps already fitted them, irrespective of their class origins Those with a "large Alimentiveness" would become Cooks, those with the right combination of Benevolence, Veneration, Adhesiveness, Philo-progenitiveness, Ideality, Comparison, Hope and Language, would become Clergymen, and those with Individuality, Eventuality, Combativeness, Ideality, Language and Form would do for Editors² The beauty of the system was that, in skilled hands, it could be used to make *post facto* judgements with an air of profound wisdom Once, in the garden at Kelmscott House, the aged E T Craig, author of *Shakespeare's Portraits Phrenologically Considered*, and the last of the notable Owenite leaders, was holding forth on the science, and demonstrating on his audience. Shaw, who was under examination, enquired after his bump of Veneration "A bump?" shrieked the old gentleman, striking his stick into the ground "Why, it's a 'ole!"³

Phrenology appeared to offer to the Owenite Socialists the last and conclusive link in their chain of argument As late as 1881 Dr Henry Travis, the last significant Owenite propagandist, published a booklet on *English Socialism the Co-operative System of Society*, in which he wrote.

"English Socialism differs essentially from every other scheme of social reform, in being based upon a new system of the Formation of Character, which has been practically verified, by which all will be educated to be 'good'"⁴

Owen both in his teachings and in his practice at New Lanark had laid the greatest stress upon the provision of a co-operative

¹ O S Fowler, *Memory and Intellectual Improvement, etc* (n d), p 79

² *Ibid*, pp 73-7

³ May Morris, II, p 187

⁴ Henry Travis, M D, *English Socialism The Co-operative System of Society* (1881) Travis published a number of tracts in 1879 and 1880

social environment for children, and in the importance of every form of education. The Owenite educationalist now needed only to master the science of skulls to be able to take into account and counteract any inherent anti-social proclivities in his pupils given the necessary knowledge of his material, nothing could prevent him from fashioning it into good citizenship in a co-operative commonwealth. It was only necessary (or so Henry Travis seemed to think) to overcome certain tricky metaphysical arguments about causation and free-will for the world to be convinced. So much for "English Socialism" in 1881! Henry Travis and his few remaining followers still had a fine ideal of what a co-operative future could be like but their idealism had run to waste in sad futilities. Nothing could be more true, both literally and symbolically, than that they had stood the theory of Socialism on its head.

In fact, "Socialism" no longer meant Owenism to the British public in 1880. Most frequently it was used as a boggy-word to cover the "outrages" of the Commune, the terrorist methods of the Russian nihilists—bomb-plots, assassination, dynamite. "Socialism! Then blow us up, blow us up! There's nothing left for it but that", cried Dr. Warre, Headmaster of Eton, when informed by one of his masters, Henry Salt, of his conversion in 1880.¹ Useful boggy as this was, it was in part a recognition of the fact that modern Socialism now meant European Socialism, and it was from European sources that the Socialism of the 1880s drew both its theory and its initial impetus. Not only were Marx and Engels living in London, and in contact with working-class and Radical circles, but also there passed through London and were scattered in all the major cities of Britain refugees from the terror in Russia, from the Commune, from the persecutions of the Austrian police, and—after 1878—from Bismarck's Anti-Socialist laws in Germany. It is the veteran of 1848 who is described as the first Socialist influence upon the hero of *The Pilgrims of Hope*.

"At last it befel on a day
That I came across our Frenchman at the edge of the new-mown hay,
A-fishing as he was wont, alone as he always was "

¹ H. S. Salt, *Seventy Years Among Savages* (1921), p. 65

It is the refugee who first describes "the tale that never ends".

"The battle of grief and hope with riches and tolly and wrong
 He told how the weak conspire, he told of the fear of the strong,
 He told of dreams grown deeds, deeds done ere time was ripe,
 Of hope that melted in air like the smoke of his evening pipe,
 Of the fight long after hope in the teeth of all despair,
 Of battle and prison and death, of life stripped naked and bare "

Such men as this influenced the conversion of a number of the pioneers—Adam Weiler, the journeyman joiner and friend of Marx, who raised the standard of the eight-hour day in the T U C in the 1870s, and who first introduced James MacDonald, the tailor, to Engels' articles in *The Labour Standard* in 1881.¹ Hermann Jung, the Vaudois watchmaker of Clerkenwell, an opponent of Marx after the break-up of the First International, who assisted Belfort Bax on his way Frederick Lessner, "white of hair and beard, dignified of aspect", a refugee of 1848, close friend of Marx and Engels, and member of the General Council of the First International, who was later to become a pillar of the Hammersmith Branch of the Socialist League.²

Of all groups refugees are notoriously subject to bickering and schisms, which can only be healed when some opportunity arises of sinking their differences in common action. But, transplanted from the oppressive soil of the continent to the "free" land of liberal England, many of the refugees were at a loss as to what action they could take. Their first reactions were those of relief and astonishment. Andreas Scheu recalled his emotions on escaping from Vienna to London in 1874:

"A total change of atmosphere! I felt it sharply with each breath I drew. I was transferred into a new free world where I could plan my affairs at will. In the neat rooms I had rented from friendly Mrs Child I felt so ridiculously free and independent that I had to stop myself from shouting with joy. When I asked Mrs Child whether she would not have to report me to the police, she laughed out loud.

" 'Yes, but . . . ' I said, 'that should be done. Suppose I were a criminal.' At that she laughed all the more, and so unrestrainedly that the tears came into her blue eyes.

¹ James MacDonald, "How I Became a Socialist", *Justice*, July 11th, 1896.

² See May Morris, II, p. 186.

"A feeling of expansion more delightful than I had ever before experienced came over me" ¹

Once the respite from persecution had been savoured to the full—how could this freedom be put to use? Scheu found two clubs of exiles in existence in 1874.² The largest group were followers of Lassalle, and met in a public house in Rupert Street they could muster nearly 200 members. The smaller group of Marxists numbered perhaps forty, and met in the first story of "The Blue Post" in Newman Street. Every time they attempted to hold any public meetings—they informed Scheu—the "Rupert-Streeters" invaded their meetings and voted them down—so what was the use? About a dozen of them continued to meet, but their gatherings were only social. Presiding over them was Leo Frankel, the "beloved comrade", Hungarian goldsmith and Minister of Labour in the Commune, who "brought the last word" of Marx and Engels to the meetings. "They were mostly men past middle age, and already long-standing members of some English trade union or other." There they could be found, drinking and gossiping around a table, some smoking pipes "almost half a yard long."

"After about an hour and a half's pleasant chat the 'meeting' would be declared closed, and everyone would return home quite contented. There was nothing in the Rules about business. It was all a very pleasant social affair" ³

In the next two or three years, after a good deal of internecine warfare, the "Rupert-Streeters" and "Internationalists" at length merged into the General Communist Workers' Union, with headquarters at the Rose Street Club. Membership was open to all nationalities, and a few slender contacts were made with English workers. In 1878 a new disruptive influence entered the Club in the person of Johann Most, who was—like Scheu—a

¹ Andreas Scheu, *Umsturzkeime* [Seeds of Revolution] (1920), Part III, Ch. I. Scheu wrote his reminiscences when he was a very old man, and, since he was extremely partisan and rather vain, they should be treated with some care. They are, however, at least as accurate as Hyndman's various reminiscences.

² See the reminiscences of Frank Kitz, *Freedom*, February-April, 1912, H. W. Lee, *Social-Democracy in Britain* (1935), Ch. III, Section I, F. Lessner, *Sixty Years in the Social-Democratic Movement* (1907), pp. 41-2.

³ Scheu, *op. cit.*, Part III, Ch. 3.

refugee from the "Left" Socialists of Vienna. After his arrival in Britain Most moved rapidly towards anarchism. The new sense of "freedom" went to his head, and he maintained contacts with comrades working in dangerous circumstances on the continent, while neglecting all precautions or secrecy in London. Scheu, although an old comrade-in-arms of his, was disgusted.

"At the bar of the Rose Street Club Hans usually held his fiery harangues and informed the stout-hearted drinkers and the disguised police-spies of his ripe plans of revolt. He had sent his emissaries to Germany and these would soon make a clean sweep of things! The first one of the scoundrels to be swept away in this clean-up would be Mattei, the Berlin Director of Police, then this one, then that one, whomever he disliked. He would read aloud at the bar the confidential letters of his agents. The small public-house was riddled with police-agents of all nations, yet when I remarked on this he laughed at me. 'Ah—let them know what they like, they can't do much about it any longer. This time we're going to make world history!'"

The office of his paper, *Freiheit*, was kept unlocked. When comrades remonstrated, Most replied, "Ah, what's all the fuss about? We are in a free country". At the French restaurant in Charlotte Street, Madame Audenet's, the refugees—French, Russian, and German—used to foregather together, Scheu maintained, with two police-spies who eagerly followed their conversation. One day Most burst in "with a ghost-like face", and whispered in Scheu's ear

" 'My list of subscribers has vanished' "

" 'How do you mean—vanished?' I inquired "

" 'Vanished—stolen by some scoundrel' "

" 'Indeed? Didn't you have it secured in a cupboard?' "

" 'One can't lock up everything in a free country' , , "

Suspicion was narrowed to one man. But his lodgings were empty. He had left London in a hurry that morning. Victor Dave, a leader of the "Communist-Anarchist" refugees, left directly for Germany to warn the comrades. He was arrested and gaoled. A joiner named Neve, "a very intelligent and self-sacrificing comrade", went after him, only to end his life in a prison camp in Saxony. No wonder Marx was writing to his friend Sorge in disgust in September, 1879, of Most's "most childish vanity", and "idiotic secret conspiratorial plans"¹

¹ *Marx-Engels Sel. Cor.*, p. 345

Such anecdotes do not belong only to the history of European Socialism, because (as we shall see) it was at the Rose Street Club that several workers, later to become prominent in the Socialist League, first imbibed their own revolutionary ideas. Most and Victor Dave succeeded in gaining control of this Club, and the Marxists retired to form a new Club at Tottenham Street¹ "The Workers Assoc is splitting up into all sorts of parties . . and we have trouble enough in preventing ourselves from being dragged into the whirl", Engels wrote to Becker on April 1st, 1880

"It is all a storm in a teacup, which may in some ways have a very good influence on those who take part in it but so far as the course of the world is concerned it is more or less indifferent whether a hundred German workers here declare themselves for one side or the other If they could exercise *any influence on the English*—but there is *absolutely no question of that*"²

Andreas Scheu, at about the same time, was feeling the same frustration at the internal bickering of the exiles younger than many of his comrades, and with a better mastery of the English language, he turned to give his aid to the workers of his country of refuge

"The political activity of my fellow-countrymen became more and more limited to either playing billiards or cards in the rooms at Tottenham St or to passing bloodthirsty resolutions at the Anarchist Club under the leadership of tried *agents provocateurs*, so I turned my gaze upon the purely English working-class movement which promised to move into a new phase of activity I began to visit their meetings"

II. The "Old Guard"

With the death of Chartism, and the absorption of the Chartist local leadership into the radical wing of the Liberal Party and into the Co-operative movement, a few individuals here and there were too tough to be digested by the bourgeois machine Three notably—James and Charles Murray and John Sketchley—provide in their lives a link between the old Chartism and the new Socialism.

¹ Cf *Freedom*, February-April, 1912, Lee, *op cit*, Ch III, Section 1

² *Marx-Engels Sel Cor*, p 380

Sketchley was born in 1822, and appointed at the age of seventeen to be Secretary of the South Leicestershire Chartist Society, a post he held for ten years. He helped to organize relief for the refugees of 1848, studied the writings of Mazzini, and in 1851 was associated with W. J. Linton and *The Republic*. He was excommunicated by the Catholic Church in 1859 for writing *Popery Its Supporters and Opponents*, and was even thrown out of his own home.

In 1870 Sketchley settled in Birmingham, which was soon to become the headquarters of Joseph Chamberlain's and Dilke's short-lived republican agitation. He was outstanding among the old Chartists for his attention to international events, and his patient compilation of facts and statistics. In 1872-3 he was one of the chief contributors to the *International Herald*, edited by W. H. Riley, who later published a few numbers of a paper called *The Socialist* in Sheffield. Meanwhile, an illness of the Prince of Wales had given the Press the opportunity to arouse a wave of sympathy for the Queen, and most of the middle-class "Republicans" had let the agitation drop. Here and there, on the other hand, groups of radical working men carried on the fight, and from these Republican Clubs one or two of the early Socialists were later drawn. Sketchley founded in 1875 a "Birmingham Republican Association", which three years later changed its name to the "Midland Social Democratic Association". This body can almost certainly claim to have been the first English society of the modern Socialist movement, but it has yet to be shown that it was more than a paper organization. In 1879, certainly, Sketchley himself was very active: he was contributing to German Socialist papers and published *The Principles of Social Democracy: an Exposition and a Vindication*—a book full of statistical information on profits and working-class incomes, and in which were published the Principles of the Social Democratic Party of Germany and of the Social Democrats of America (1877). "Our comrade never remained stationary", Morris wrote in a Preface to Sketchley's later *Review of European Society*. "He was always advancing, always searching for truth, always working for the realization of justice." He was the first Secretary of the Birmingham Branch of the Democratic Federation, an active member of the Socialist League and one of the most regular contributors to

Commonweal, and (after he removed to Hull) a member of the S D F into the present century ¹

Sketchley's *Principles of Social Democracy* introduced a few of the first of the Socialist pioneers to the ideas of European Socialism,² and his activities may have stirred a few minds in the Midlands. The brothers James and Charles Murray played a small part in setting the London propaganda afoot. The Murrays had been active members of the Chartist locality in Soho. In 1854 Charles, the elder, had come to the aid of Ernest Jones in a bout of polemic with George Jacob Holyoake, the Secularist and Co-operator.

"What an absurdity! the Middle and Working Classes one! There are no two divisions—no two classes of people—no two interests so diametrically opposed to each other as the Middle Class and Working Class."³

The brothers worked in Bronterre O'Brien's National Reform League, and O'Brien lodged with Charles Murray during some of his last years of obscurity. After his death, the Murrays and their friends maintained contact, and held political discussions, in the "Three Doves", in Berwick Street, Soho.⁴

Here they were joined by a young recruit, Frank Kitz, who left recollections of their meetings. Kitz, who was to play a prominent part in the Socialist League, was the son of a German exile, and was born in Kentish Town in 1848 or 1849. His lonely childhood, in conditions of extreme poverty (see p. 173), turned him into a rebel. "I decorated the walls of my lonely room with pictures of the French Revolution. . . . Brought up in the neighbourhood of the West End . . . I needed no lectures upon surplus value . . . to cause me to challenge the justice of a system which confers wealth upon the parasites of society and clouds the lives of thousands . . . with care and poverty." After

¹ See *Proposed Testimonial to Mr John Sketchley* (August, 1900), signed by E. Copeland and H. Percy Ward of Birmingham, John Sketchley, *A Review of European Society* (1884), with Preface by William Morris, John Sketchley, "Personal Experiences in the Chartist Movement", *To-Day*, July, 1884.

² Frank Kitz recalled in *Freedom*, March, 1912, that "many thousands" of Sketchley's book were sold in London in 1880-2.

³ Charles Murray, *A Letter to Mr George Jacob Holyoake* (1854).

⁴ Recollections of the late Mr Ambrose Barker.

tramping the country in search of work, he settled in Soho in the early 1870s, where he was introduced to the discussions of a society styled "the Democratic and Trades Alliance Association", composed in the main of Soho tailors and shoemakers.

"I recall them as I write, the steadfast old guard who in the midst of the reaction following the collapse of Chartism and the decline of the Owenite agitation were the last remnant of the British Federation of the International . . . As a young recruit I stood alone"¹

Among the circle he recalled the two Murrays, G. Eccarius, J. Bedford Leno (the Buckinghamshire poet, active both in the Chartist movement and the agitation before the Reform Bill of 1867), W. Townshend ("a tall, gaunt, kindly old shoemaker, the possessor of a vast accumulation of books and knowledge pertaining to the cause"), John Rogers (a friend of Marx) and Maltman Barry, Dr. Henry Travis, Dr. Gammage (the historian of Chartism—an "associate"), and others. Frank Kitz's entrance into this circle was in the immediate aftermath of the Paris Commune, when the British section of the First International was falling apart through the defection of most of its trade unionist support. The survivors formed themselves into the "Manhood Suffrage League" (which persisted, in name at least, into the late 1880s) but when the Rose Street Club was founded (1877), Kitz (who spoke fluent German) took part in its formation and quickly came under the influence of Johann Most and Victor Dave.²

James Murray was Chairman of a demonstration called in Hyde Park, on April 16th, 1871, in support of the Paris Commune.³ The meeting was called by the "International Democratic Association", but in truth in the 1870s it is difficult to keep track of the high-sounding titles which the old guard employed in the hope of attracting public interest. At one time Kitz formed an "English Revolutionary Society" at another, the English Section of the Rose Street Club went under the *alias* of

¹ *Freedom*, January-February, 1912

² *Freedom*, January-May, 1912. *Commonweal*, September 11th, 1886. An important forerunner of these little London organizations of the late 1870s is the "Land and Labour League", described by R. Harrison, *Bulletin of the International Institute of Social History Amsterdam*, 1953, No. 3

³ Handbill among Nettlau MSS, Int. Inst. Soc. Hist.

the "Local Rights Association for Rental and Sanitary Reform" ¹ "I am prepared to be called an opportunist, an intriguer", wrote Joseph Lane, the founder of the Labour Emancipation League, in later years,

"but little do any of those in the movement to-day know the trials and troubles of the early days, the dodges and subterfuges we had to resort to to get a hearing at all, in the streets, in halls, anywhere except in the Piesse"

If the pioneers were reported when they held their annual meeting to commemorate the Commune, it was, "I suppose, because we were a strange species of animal" ² Joseph Lane himself, who was to play a leading part in the Socialist League, was one of the most remarkable of these "strange animals" Born in 1850, at the age of fifteen he was attending political meetings in his home village of Wallingford Coming to London in 1867, he joined, in 1871, the remnant of the English section of the First International, and became a member of the "Manhood Suffrage League" In the early 1870s he took an active part in the republican agitation, accompanying Dilke on one of his tours, and earning the nickname of "Dilke's boy" He was a carter by trade, widely read in political theory, and "a born organizer and intensely earnest propagandist" ³ From 1878 onwards he was associated with every move to set an organized Socialist propaganda afoot

However, it is perhaps misleading to describe as "Socialist" the activities of Lane, Kitz and the Murrays in the 1870s They, and other ultra-Radical groups, were pressing demands on a medley of issues, among which the "Land Question", the realization of advanced democratic rights and opposition to coercion in Ireland were pre-eminent A characteristic pamphlet, published by one of the old Chartist guard at the end of the 1860s, demanded manhood suffrage, *total* abolition of property qualifications (including those for jurymen), equal electoral districts, annual parliaments, vote by ballot, and payment of members together with social remedies proposed in the main by Owen or O'Brien These points included (1) pensions for the

¹ *Freedom*, April, 1912

² Nettlau MSS, Int Inst Soc Hist (in a letter to Ambrose G Barker, March 22nd, 1912)

³ Reminiscence of Ambrose G. Barker in *Freedom*, May, 1931

aged and infirm, (2) public works to relieve unemployment, (3) the nationalization of the land, mines, rocks, forests, rivers, fisheries, "and all other things to which value has not been added by the labour of man"—the receipts from which would abolish the need for any Rates or Taxes, (4), (5), and (6) the replacement of ordinary currency by Paper Labour Notes, National Banks of Credit, and Public Marts (on the Owenite plan) for the valuation and exchange of goods. Railways, canals, docks, waterworks, and other public services would become public property. free compulsory education (between the ages of six and twelve), colleges and workshops for further education, and wide public facilities for cultural recreation, would be provided.

"This, my friends and fellow workmen would be really, truly, and justly enjoying God's creation. This would be living as I believe heaven intended every man should live—by the sweat of his own brow. With plenty of land on or from which man could produce just what he required with timber and stone of all kinds in abundance with clays that would mould and burn to any shape with metals and glass with colours of every hue with plenty of gold and silver for gilding and other purposes. Why should not God's people live in palaces?"¹

The landed aristocracy and the mine-owners were still in the 1870s the main targets for Radical attack. The nationalization of the land had been the first plank in the programme of the Land and Labour League.² In 1871 John Stuart Mill had founded the Land Tenure Reform Association, which carried on the agitation, although in a shorn form. Agitation against specific injustices—the Game Laws, enclosures, and hereditary privileges—in which such influential Radicals as P. A. Taylor and Charles Bradlaugh took a leading part, had served to keep feeling against the aristocracy high. At the end of the decade, the severe agricultural depression revived the agitation on "the Land Question", which swelled to new heights and contributed to the birth of modern Socialism. But, at the same time, the demand for land nationalization was in no way a specifically Socialist demand, and could,

¹ W. Dixon, *A Non-Elector's Reform Bill, comprising New Institutions which will enable every man to have a house, his own private property, free from Rent, Rate, or Tax, also, to earn and enjoy £400 Every Year, without asking employment from, or being dependent on the interest of his Fellow Man* (n.d.). A note on my copy shows that James Murray was associated with Dixon, who was a London fancy-brush maker.

² See R. Harrison, *op. cit.*

indeed, set earnest Radicals off on a false scent, since it directed attention only to the robbery of the people accomplished by means of the private ownership of the land and raw materials, and distracted attention from the far greater robbery accomplished by means of the private ownership of the means of production and exchange ¹ This one-sidedness was to persist among some members of Morris's Socialist League to Frank Kitz, land nationalization was always the "Question of Questions" until the end of his life ² But Joseph Lane took a step forward from the advanced radical position when, in the late 1870s, he took part in a land agitation in the East End of London His propaganda directed the eyes of the workers, not to the Highlands or the rural fastnesses of the feudal bigandage, but to their own conditions

"30,000,000 of our People own no Land, while Seven London Landholders draw £14,640,000 per annum from the People of London alone as Ground Rents for Land which was originally pasture lands—What are these 30,000,000 of people with no Land or means of living, but the hired slaves of those who hold the Land or of the capitalist class who hold the Means of Production and Exchange?"³

From this point it was only a short step to the adoption of a thoroughgoing Socialist outlook

In the late 1870s, then, there was a small but active group, in contact with the working-class Radical Clubs of East London, which advocated universal manhood suffrage and the fullest democratic rights republicanism the nationalization of the land solidarity with democratic movements abroad and which had hazy ideas of Socialist theory, drawn both from Owenite and

¹ See, for example, the view of W Dixon, *op cit*, that while the feudal aristocracy must be dispossessed forcibly of their land and mines, the industrial bourgeoisie would simply be displaced peacefully by the growth of credit-aided handicrafts and co-operative workshops

² Letter of Kitz to Nettlau, 1912, Nettlau MSS, Int Inst Soc Hist

³ Handbill, *An Open Letter to Baron De Forest, M P for West Ham, or any other Public Spirited Member of Parliament who will take up THE LAND QUESTION on behalf of the People*, by Joseph Lane At about this time Lane was in correspondence with James Murray, who wrote to him "I have not handy any publications on Spade Tillage The best work on the subject I ever had was Fergus O'Connor's half crown little book" (Brit Mus Add MSS 46345) This refers to O'Connor's *Practical Work on the Management of Small Farms* (1846) On April 23rd, 1882, Ambrose Barker was lecturing to the Stratford Club on "The Science of Tillage Operations"

from European sources Lane, in 1878, was working actively in the Marylebone Radical Association, and this group induced several influential Radical Clubs to sign an "Address to the Heroes and Martyrs of the Commune", in May, 1879.¹ Events in 1880 and 1881 served to bring a few of these pioneers—refugees, class-conscious old Chartists, rebels like Frank Kitz and Jack Williams² who had formed the English Section of the Rose Street Club—into contact with the younger militant Radicals "What mainly brought about this united action", Ambrose Barker recalled, "was the disillusionment of the working classes with the Gladstone Government"

"From 1874 to 1880 the conservatives had ruled, going from bad to worse with Gladstone as leader of the discontent. He seemed to gather all the forces of progress under his leadership. When the general election of 1880 resulted in the greatest majority of liberals since the Reform Bill of 1832, great things were expected of it. Almost their first action was to introduce a Coercion Bill for Ireland. With that and the neglect of the social reforms which they had been led to expect, the working classes were grievously disappointed. The prosecution of *Freiheit* further helped to disillusion the people and organisations came into being advocating social change, with a very strong element that could plainly see the futility of parliament as a means of emancipation."³

In 1881 James MacDonald, the tailor, coming to London from Edinburgh, found that a small propaganda was already under way. Attending a meeting of a Scottish Club in a public house in Tottenham Street he was told one evening by the landlord that "some of the most red-hot Fenians and dynamiters in England" were meeting in another room.

"Some of us were curious and eventually got introduced to them. There were Frank Kitz, James and Charles Murray, Garcia, Townsend,

¹ Organizations signing this Address "from the Social Democrats of London" included the Westminster Democratic Club, Tower Hamlets Radical Association, Patriotic Club, Lambeth Reform Union, Federal Workmen's League, Manhood Suffrage League, and Sketchley's Midland Social Democratic Association.

² John Edward Williams escaped from a workhouse at the age of ten, and was in the thick of every fight he could find from that time onwards. He was one of the members of the English Section of the Rose Street Club. See *John E. Williams and the Early History of the S D F* (1886), and H. W. Lee, *op cit*, (1935), pp. 86-7.

³ *Freedom*, May, 1931.

Butler, and others They were vehemently denouncing the Coercion Bill I was an enthusiastic admirer of Mr Gladstone and his party, and at once took up the cudgels on behalf of my heroes We followed up the meetings of these men and formed a sort of opposition But gradually we found we were losing ground, and then we threw in our lot with the others and formed the Central Marylebone Democratic Association "1

Thus, many of the radical working men who (like William Morris in the days of the National Liberal League (see p 299 f)) had for six years been dreaming great things of Gladstone's return to power, were month by month sinking into ever more bitter disappointment at the imperialist policies of the Liberal Government in Ireland and overseas, and at its failure to relieve the misery intensified by the "Great Depression" at home With each reverse of progressive hopes, the handful of old militants and the younger fighting Radicals were brought closer together and it so happened that the irrepressible Johann Most found himself the (unwilling) agent of binding these links still closer. For months Most had been editing *Freiheit*, a paper circulating illegally in Germany, from his (unlocked) office in 22 Percy Street Most seems to have begun to believe that the rising revolutionary spirit of the German workers was largely due to his own leadership and articles 2 "Most, in his confused anxiety to do something, can neither keep quiet nor accomplish anything whatever," Engels wrote early in 1880

"*Freiheit*, by main force, is to become the most revolutionary paper in the world,—but this is not achieved by just repeating the word revolution in every line "3

Drunk with belief that he was in a "free" country, Most did not trouble himself to learn anything of British conditions, "and swore in a great voice that he didn't want to learn such a petty language" 4 He was soon to learn his mistake In the spring of

¹ *Justice*, July 11th, 1896

² Cf Scheu, *op cit*, Part III, Ch 2 "He himself and his newspaper tried to take the credit for the development of this revolutionary spirit" Marx to Sorge (September 19th, 1879) "The worthy Johann Most, a man of the most childish vanity, really believes that world conditions have suffered a vast transformation because this same Most is now housed in London instead of in Germany "

³ *Marx-Engels Sel Cor*, p 380

⁴ Scheu, *op cit*, Part III, Ch 2

1881, on the news of the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, Most published in *Freiheit* an article which Morris described as "a song of triumph", in which tyrannicide was welcomed as a "panacea" from "St Petersburg to Washington" ¹ Scheu warned Most that he had overstepped the mark

"The English are accustomed to wear a mask of respectability, and to make a show of respecting their opponents"

"Ah! they will still respect the free expression of opinion"

"The next day I read in the *Daily News* that Johann Most had been arrested"

Few of Most's comrades in exile had much sympathy to waste on him—not so much because of the tone of the article which occasioned his arrest, as because of his foolhardy behaviour in the previous months which had endangered the lives and liberty of their fellow-countrymen. But to some of the London Radicals the case was altogether different. The spectacle of the unctious Liberal Home Secretary instituting proceedings—almost certainly at the behest of Bismarck—of the bullying behaviour of Judge Coleridge of the sentence of sixteen months' hard labour and of the later rumours of vindictive treatment of Most in prison—all these shocked a section of radical opinion. Not only was there a fund of goodwill towards the Russian revolutionaries among the British workers, but also, the tradition of the fight of Carlile and Hetherington, Holyoake and Bradlaugh for a free Press was still very much alive. Ambrose Barker, the young Secretary of the Stratford Radical and Dialectical Club, who became Chairman of the *Freiheit* Defence Committee, had come from a family associated with these struggles, and remembered being introduced as a boy—a few years before—to James Watson, the veteran bookseller of the days of the "Great Unstamped" ² The agitation in Most's defence brought together the most advanced of the Radicals, together with Frank Kitz and other English members of the Rose Street Club, who published seven English numbers of *Freiheit* between April 24th and June 5th, 1881. Jack Williams, later to become one of the main stalwarts of the S D F, stood outside the Old Bailey while the trial was

¹ May Morris, I, p. 583. See also E. Belfort Bax, *Reminiscences and Reflexions of a Mid and Late Victorian* (1918), p. 42, and *Marx-Engels Sel. Cor.*, p. 391.

² A. G. Barker, *Henry Hetherington* (n.d.), p. 36.

under way, selling the second issue, which contained a full translation of the article for which Most was being prosecuted "No notice was taken of this daring challenge to the Liberal Government, which was evidently afraid to deal out the same injustice to an Englishman as to a foreign refugee."¹

The contact—once established—was maintained. At Ambrose Barker's Stratford Club lectures were delivered by Prince Kropotkin, James Murray, Frank Kitz and others. Joseph Lane, moving to Hackney in 1881, formed a "Homerton Social Democratic Club", to which Andreas Scheu was lecturing on "Socialism *versus* Capitalism" on July 1st, 1881.² In the same month Lane attended, as delegate from the Club, a small international Anarchist Congress, held in London.³ By the end of the year, he was taking a leading part in the formation of the first Socialist organization in London with any influence—the Labour Emancipation League.

The Labour Emancipation League, which drew into a common organization many of the individuals already active in London, was a halfway house, in which the theories of the old guard and of the new pioneers both found expression. Its object was declared to be "the establishment of a Free Social Condition of Society, based on the principle of Political Equality, with Equal Social Advantages for All". The first six points in its programme were based on the advanced democratic demands of the Chartist and Radical traditions.⁴ The seventh demanded the nationalization of land, mines, and means of transit. The final two served as a bridge to modern Socialism.

"(8) As Labour is the foundation of all Wealth the Regulation of Production must belong to Society, and the Wealth produced be equitably shared by All

¹ See John E. Williams and the Early History of the S D F, H. W. Lee, *op cit*, pp. 42, 46, *Freedom*, May, 1930, May, 1931. The Radical carried reports of the activities of the Freiheit Defence Committee.

² Brit. Mus. Add. MSS. 46345 (Burns Collection).

³ *Ibid.* (Lane's credentials as Delegate No. 2). For this Congress, see Max Nettlau, *Anarchisten und Sozialrevolutionäre der Jahre 1880-1886*.

⁴ (1) Equal Direct Adult Suffrage and Ballot, (2) Direct Legislation by the People, (3) Abolition of a Standing Army—the People to decide on Peace or War, (4) Free Secular Education, (5) Liberty of Speech, Press, and Meeting, (6) Free Administration of Justice. Points (3) and (4) had also been part of the Programme of the Land and Labour League, see R. Harrison, *op cit*.

"(9) As at present the Instruments of Labour and the Means of Employment are monopolised by the Capitalist Classes, which Monopoly is the cause of the misery and servitude of the Working People, the Emancipation of Labour requires the transformation of the said Instruments of Production and the Means of Employment into Collective or Public Property, for the benefit of All Members of Society "

Soon the L E L. claimed branches at Mile End, Canning Town, Hoxton, Bethnal Green, Millwall, Stamford Hill and Hackney. Joseph Lane became Secretary (after the defection of the first Secretary, Moseley Aaion) and he urged forward open-air propaganda, occasionally in Hyde Park and Regent's Park, but consistently on Mile End Waste, Clekenwell Green, at Stamford and Millwall. Without financial backing or middle-class support, Lane and his comrades printed amateurish leaflets on an antiquated hand-press. They denounced Gladstone's Irish policies. In the poverty-stricken and crowded streets of the East End they distributed Manifestos calling for a Rent Strike. In co-operation with the English Section of the Rose Street Club they held a large demonstration on Mile End Waste to expose the policy of State-aided emigration for the unemployed, demanding a programme of public works, and declaring

"1 instead of assisting Canadian Speculators to get cheap labour by Public Charity, the people should demand the restitution of their common birthright, the Land

"2 The only emigration at all necessary or desirable is that of the idle, aristocratic, and capitalistic classes "1

The agitation soon won attention, not only from the police, but also from a few of the younger Radicals who, disillusioned with the actions of Gladstone's Ministry, were seeking for a profounder analysis of the causes of social misery than that of Charles Bradlaugh or of Joseph Chamberlain. Among them were members of yet another organization which had been formed in 1881—the Democratic Federation.

III *The Intellectuals*

While Joseph Lane, the Murrays, Kitz and Barker were beginning to start a Socialist agitation among the London workers, Socialism was also beginning to attract the curiosity of some young

¹ L E L. handbill, *State Emigration*

middle-class intellectuals "I have a pile of half a dozen German pamphlets on Socialism which I must read to-day", George Gissing, serving his apprenticeship on Grub Street, was writing to his admiring younger brother in August, 1880.¹ In April of the next year Marx was complaining half-humorously to his daughter Jenny, of "an invasion from Hyndman and spouse, who both have too much staying power"

"I don't dislike the wife, for she has a brusque, unconventional and decided way of thinking and speaking, but it is funny to see how admiringly her eyes fasten upon the lips of her self-satisfied, garrulous husband"²

In December, 1881, he was writing to Sorge "The English have recently begun to occupy themselves more with *Capital*" The *Contemporary Review* had published a "very inadequate" and inaccurate article on Socialism Hyndman had published (in the previous June) *England for All* and *Modern Thought* had just published an article by Ernest Belfort Bax on Marx himself, "the first English publication of the kind which is pervaded by a real enthusiasm for the new ideas themselves and boldly stands up against British Philistinism".³

Already there were in England one or two schools of thought which—while in themselves not in the least Socialist—were likely to attract young intellectuals receptive to new ideas. Most important, perhaps, were the Positivists Although these numbered only a few hundreds in the 1870s, they included among their number men and women of the influence of Professor Beesly, George Eliot, John Morley, and Frederick Harrison, Editor of the *Fortnightly Review* "Live not for self, but for the world" was the great motto of the followers of Comte's "Religion of Humanity" "Order and progress—Live in the light." At the opening of the 1880s they were divided into two groups the followers of Dr Congreve, who actually went so far as to attempt to inaugurate a Priesthood of Humanity⁴ and the "Newton Hall" Positivists, who confined their activities more to the educational enlightenment of themselves and others, to meetings where they recalled the great men of all races and creeds, and to simple

¹ See A and E Gissing, *Letters of George Gissing to His Family* (1927)

² *Marx-Engels Selected Correspondence*, p 389

³ *Ibid*, pp 397-8

⁴ See Malcolm Quinn, *Memoirs of a Positivist* (1924)

ceremonials on certain occasions. It is difficult to find any central core to the beliefs of Comte's English followers. They strove so earnestly to look with benevolence upon the philosophies of all times and ages, the religious faiths of both East and West.

"Nothing that is purely negative, purely destructive or aggressive, is ever made a part of the work. The most devout Christian may come and listen, with patience, at least, if not with assent. The most Conservative will hear true Conservatism treated with sympathy. The most ardent Republican will find us accepting his hopes, even if we cannot always share his methods."¹

They attracted towards themselves some who were no more than genteel rationalists who did not wish to associate themselves with the aggressive agitation of the Secular Societies. On the other hand, among a few of them there was genuine depth of learning, breaking through the insularity of the Victorian middle class and an unusual alertness of social conscience. Both Beesly and Harrison had worked hard to improve the legal rights of the trade unions. When the London trade unionists organized a mass demonstration in the Suffrage agitation of 1865, Beesly, Harrison, Henry Crompton and others stood at the upper windows of the Reform Club to watch

"As the procession passed with their banners, the men cheered the Club, taking it to be the seat of the Reforming party. The habitués at the lower windows looked on, but did not reciprocate the compliment. We young Radicals above saluted the Unionists. And when a member of the Committee begged us to desist from showing sympathy with the men, we declined to share their contemptuous indifference to the workmen's salute."²

The incident is full of symbolism. Beesly and Harrison continued to look to the workers—not indeed to overthrow capitalism, but under their guidance to moralize it from below. On international questions also, Harrison and his colleagues took an enlightened and often courageous stand (see p. 297), and in the early 1880s Newton Hall was a centre of agitation against the "damned little wars" of the imperialists.

The attraction of Positivism to a fairly average young middle-class intellectual, in search of "advanced" views, is expressed in

¹ Frederick Harrison in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, November 29th, 1883.

² F. Harrison, *Autobiographic Memoirs*, Vol. II, p. 80.

one of Gissing's portentous letters to his younger brother

"Positivists say, let us devote ourselves to the study of man in history, and, by the exercise of warm charity to all humankind, work for the advancement of our species on the lines which history teaches us to predict I always refer, in speaking of Positivism, to its *intellectual* side, its inculcation, for instance, of a system of politics based upon a study of the laws of human development and, in social matters, of ceaseless efforts towards universal justice and light Of course, with myself, its emotional side, the so-termed Religion of Humanity, has also vast influence, and I can feel this enthusiasm for the Race to be a force perfectly capable of satisfying the demands usually supplied by creeds, confessions, etc."¹

Only two months later, Gissing had passed from Positivism into a brief flirtation with Socialism

"I am preparing a lecture on "Practical Aspects of Socialism", for a society with which I have connected myself Its object (that of the Society) is an attempt to educate the working classes in some degree by means of lectures at their various clubs"²

Quite clearly, Gissing's attitude was poisoned by intellectual patronage. But the great attention paid by the leaders of the Positivists to the study of history was of no doubt of some influence in inclining Ernest Belfort Bax, one of Morris's closest Socialist colleagues, towards Socialism As a boy of sixteen Bax was moved to tears by the news of the bloody repression of the Communards in 1871, "this martyrdom of all that was noblest (as I conceived it) in the life of the time".³ Some time after this, he attached himself to the Positivists, since they were "the only organized body of persons at that time in the country who had the courage systematically to defend . the Commune".⁴ Following his talent for musical composition, he went to study in Stuttgart in 1875, and on the Continent made closer contact with European thought and political movements He became a student of German philosophy, and his studies and political sympathies both led him in 1881 to *Capital*. As a result of his monograph on Marx in *Modern Thought*, Marx sent him "many appreciative messages", but was too ill to make his acquaintance It was not until 1883, after Marx's death, that Bax was introduced to Engels and entered more deeply into Marxist studies.

¹ Gissing, *op cit*, p 92

² *Ibid*, p 96

³ E B Bax, *op cit*, p 29

⁴ *Ibid*, p 30

In any school of thought at war with the dynasty of Podsnap, and challenging the great orthodoxies of Religion, Patriotism, Self-interest and Property, there were bound to be minds receptive to Socialist influences. Both Unitarians and Secularists contributed recruits to the early Socialist movement. The revolt against Victorian prudery, the influence of the old watchwords "Equality" and "Fraternity" which were now returning to a few young intellectuals by way of the literature of America and Europe, stirred other minds.

"And so I heard a voice say, 'What is Freedom?'

"And I heard (in the height) another voice say

"I AM

"In the recluse, the thinker, the incurable and the drudge, I AM I am the giver of Life, I am Happiness

"The long advances of history, the lives of men and women—the men that scratched the reindeer and mammoth on bits of bone, the Bushmen painting their rude rock-paintings, the mud-hovels clustering round mediaeval castles, the wise and kindly Arab with his loving boy-attendants, the Swiss mountain-herdsmen, the Russian patriot, the English mechanic,

"Know ME I am Happiness in them, in all—underlying "

No, not Walt Whitman, but his most famous English disciple, Edward Carpenter, in his *Towards Democracy*, written between 1881 and 1882. During the years of his adolescence, Shelley had been Carpenter's ideal. At Cambridge in 1869 (at the age of twenty-five) he first read William Michael Rossetti's edition of Whitman's poems, and felt "a great leap of joy"

"From that time forward a profound change set in within me. I remember the long and beautiful summer nights, sometimes in the College garden by the riverside, sometimes sitting in my own window which itself overlooked a little old-fashioned garden enclosed by grey and crumbling walls—feeling all the time that my life deep down was flowing out and away from the surroundings and traditions amid which I lived—a current of sympathy carrying it westward, across the Atlantic."¹

A few years later he visited Whitman and renewed his inspiration. In Whitman's *Democratic Vistas* he found shadowed forth an

¹ Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams* (1916), p. 64

ideal of brotherhood beside which the conventions of Victorian society seemed vicious and tawdry. Working as an Extension Lecturer at Sheffield, he tried, somewhat self-consciously, to win terms of friendship with the industrial proletariat.

"Railway men, porters, clerks, signalmen, ironworkers, coach-builders, Sheffield cutlers— from the first I got on excellently and felt fully at home with them—and I believe, in most cases, they with me. I felt I had come into, or at least in sight of the world to which I belonged."¹

Class divisions were so rigorous that it seemed eccentric for a middle-class man to visit the public bar of the "local"—an adventure to travel steamer to America and back—and—despite all the preachings of Carlyle and Ruskin—a strange affront to his class for Carpenter to help with the harvesting at the local farms, to try his hand at manual jobs, and to relax of an evening in the cottage of one of the labourers. Because Carpenter's revolt was individualistic, undisciplined, and (backed by a legacy of £6,000) not especially arduous, it is easily underestimated to-day. Established at his small-holding at Millthorpe, near Sheffield, with Thoreau's *Walden* on the shelves, receiving the visits of working-class admirers in the North, it all seems too pleasant and easy. Indeed, he seems the prototype of the sandalled and vegetarian young intellectuals, with a comfortable unearned income, whose revolt in the early years of this century took the pleasant form of a couple of years' post-graduation in "the woods", before settling into more recognized professions and whose aspirations are satisfied to-day by comfortably converted old cottages on the rural fringes of great towns, a goat in the paddock, and an occasional bout of classless *bonhomie* and darts in the village pub.

But Carpenter can no more be held responsible for the vapidness of his followers than Morris can be held responsible for rustic garden furniture. His revolt against the Victorian orthodoxies was whole-hearted enough, even if it was expressed in an individualistic form. The two ex-Eton masters, Henry Salt and J. L. Joynes—and especially the former—were moved by somewhat similar currents of feeling. Joynes was intellectually tougher than either Carpenter or Salt, and his contribution to the early

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 102

movement correspondingly greater At King's College, Cambridge, Joynes and Salt had kicked against the pricks of authority, their major exploit being to release a mole to desecrate the sanctity of the Senior Fellow's lawn¹ As masters at Eton both were under suspicion as Radicals, free-thinkers and possessors of tricycles Meanwhile Joynes was reading the German revolutionary poetry of 1848, especially of Freiligrath, translations of which he later published as *Songs of a Revolutionary Epoch* He entered the Socialist movement at its outset, and won some notoriety in 1882 by being arrested, in the company of Henry George, the author of *Progress and Poverty*, by the Irish Constabulary while on a speaking tour. This incident forced his resignation from Eton, and his total immersion for two or three years in the Socialist movement A "quiet, gentle, unobtrusive man, tall and fair, with rather stooping shoulders and ruddy, almost boyish, face",² he gave the impression rather of a scholar than a fighter But there were few Socialist activities in 1883 or 1884 in which he was not a leading spirit

George's *Progress and Poverty*, in which he set forward the demand, "We must make land common property", and proposed a means for effecting this by a drastic Single Tax, was being very widely read among advanced intellectuals and Radicals in 1881, and when he visited England and Ireland on a lecturing tour in 1882 he met with a ready welcome. The book's mixture of libertarian and Christian rhetoric with chapters of closely-argued political economy struck an answering chord among those who had already been interested in Mill's advocacy of land nationalization, and in the active campaign of Michael Davitt and the Irish Land League The "sensation" of George's book, Marx wrote to Sorge in June, 1881, "is significant because it is a first, if unsuccessful attempt at emancipation from the orthodox political economy"³ Many of George's converts, like Joynes, remained Single-Taxers for a short period only before moving forward to Socialism. A speech of George's, Shaw recalled,

¹ Henry Salt, "James Leigh Joynes Some Reminiscences", *The Social-Democrat*, Vol. I, No. 8, August, 1897 See also Salt, *Seventy Years Among Savages*

² *Ibid* (a note by Harry Quelch)

³ *Marx-Engels Sel. Cor.*, pp. 395-6 100,000 copies of *Progress and Poverty* were sold in England, 1881-3

"sent me to political economy, with which I had never concerned myself, as fundamental in any social criticism".¹ But—perhaps more important than the remedy he proposed—Henry George gave voice to the growing sense of the impermanence of the capitalist system

"Is it a light thing that labour should be robbed of its earnings while greed rolls in wealth—that the many should want while the few are surfeited Turn to history Look around to-day Can this state of things continue? Nay, the pillars of the State are trembling even now, and the very foundations of society begin to quiver with pent-up forces that glow underneath The struggle that must either revivify, or convulse in ruin, is near at hand"²

Here is another influence that brought some middle-class men towards the Socialist movement Britain's age of industrial supremacy had come to an end, and with its end the mood of confidence in Progress, which had possessed the middle class in the 1850s and 60s, was being undermined The Paris Commune, the growth of Social-Democracy in Germany, the crisis in British agriculture, the unemployed in the streets of London—these were portents which aroused uneasiness even in philistine minds, and which were forcing upon more far-seeing intellectuals an understanding of the operation of the capitalist economy, and of the precarious position of Britain in particular Trefusis, the hero of Shaw's early novel, *An Unsocial Socialist*, first published in serial form in *To-day* (where Morris read it) in 1884, but written a couple of years before, pokes fun at Erskine, a rhetorical poet of republicanism of the Swinburne breed

"'Erskine's next drama may be about liberty, but its Patriot Martyrs will have something better to do than spout balderdash against figurehead kings who in all their lives never secretly plotted as much dastardly meanness, greed, cruelty, and tyranny as is openly voted for in London by every half-yearly meeting of dividend-consuming vermin whose miserable wage-slaves drudge sixteen hours out of the twenty-four'

"'What is going to be the end of it all?' said Sir Charles, a little dazed.

"'Socialism or Smash Socialism if the race has at last evolved the faculty of co-ordinating the functions of a society too crowded and complex to be worked any longer on the old haphazard private-property

¹ May Morris, II, p. 111

² Henry George, *Progress and Poverty*, Book X, Ch. V

system Unless we re-organize our society socialistically Free Trade
by itself will ruin England . . .¹

But the recognition of these facts did not necessarily imply any pleasure at the prospect, any rebirth of the "hope" felt by Morris Even to some of those middle-class men who supported the Socialist movement, the proletariat appeared as primarily a destructive force. Morris's son-in-law, H Halliday Sparling, wrote in a pamphlet on unemployment some years later

"A million of starving people, with another million on the verge of starvation, represent a potential of destructive force to measure which no dynamometer has yet been made, but which will, if suddenly liberated, assuredly and absolutely destroy every vestige of nineteenth century civilisation so-called, will destroy it more completely than time has destroyed the traces of the society of Nineveh, of Babylon, Greece and Rome, or even Mexico"²

Crazed faces, incendiary torches, dynamiters and assassins—there were men within the Socialist movement as well as without who could not shake off the bourgeois caricature of the proletarian revolution

Even H M Hyndman, the "Father of English Socialism", and the man primarily responsible for bringing together in a single organization the various elements, proletarian and middle-class, moving towards Socialism in 1881, was not free from this attitude A wealthy middle-class man, just over forty years of age, with enormous self-confidence and a taste for adventure, Hyndman had tried his hand at county cricket, globe-trotting and journalism before he read *Capital* in 1880 and became acquainted with Marx His conversion to Socialism was rapid—suspiciously rapid in the view of Joseph Lane and his friends³ At the beginning of 1880 he was dabbling in politics, with some idea of a "Tory-Radical" revival in which he tried to interest the aged Disraeli In March of that year he offered himself as an Independent candidate at Marylebone, with a programme of "wide, steady, progressive Liberalism" at home and imperialism abroad. "The war in Afghanistan was the unavoidable consequence

¹ G B Shaw, *An Unsocial Socialist*, Ch XV

² H Halliday Sparling, *Men versus Machinery* (1888)

³ See the letter of Lane to Ambrose Barker, deriding Hyndman's claims to be *The "Father and Founder" of the Modern English Socialist Movement*, published as a leaflet in 1912

of the breach of Muscovite engagements I am altogether opposed to Home Rule in Ireland " The Colonies he declared to be "the special heritage of our working-classes", and he demanded an increase in the size of the Navy "In short, I am earnestly bent upon reform at home and resolute to maintain the power and dignity of England abroad"¹ Before the year was out, he was attempting to promote under his own leadership a union of the Radical Clubs in London—efforts which were brought to success in June, 1881, with the formation of the Democratic Federation At its first Conference, Hyndman distributed copies of his own *England for All*, in two chapters of which he borrowed liberally (and without acknowledgement) from Marx But, despite the Socialist content of these chapters, the Jingoism present in the previous year's programme was still apparent The demand for a strong Navy (persistent throughout Hyndman's later career), and the presentation of the Colonies as the special heritage of the English working-class—these ideas were set forward in rolling passages of rhetoric

"In the Atlantic and Pacific, in European waters and the China Seas, from the Cape of Good Hope to Cape Horn, and from the British islands to Australia and India, we hold a chain of posts which will enable us to exercise at the fitting moment an almost overwhelming pressure Halifax and Vancouver's Island, Bermuda and the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Malta, and Aden, Sydney, Melbourne, King George's Sound, and Auckland, to say nothing of the Indian ports, and scarcely less valuable possessions elsewhere, such as Hong-Kong, Fiji, and the Mauritius, constitute an array of maritime citadels which, maintained in proper defence by ourselves and our colonies, must, in conjunction with a fleet proportioned to our maritime interests, render future naval war against us almost impossible "

From this time forwards, Hyndman was to appear as a puzzling contradiction to Morris and to many another Socialist The difference in temperament between Morris and Hyndman is aptly illustrated in their respective attitudes to the ceremonial headgear of their class, the top hat Morris, resigning from his Directorship, had sat on his, and he never bought another In the summer of 1886 the young engineer, Alf Mattison of Leeds, took part in a rally of the Socialists of Yorkshire and Lancashire on the old Chartist meeting place dividing the two counties, Blackstone Edge

¹ The full Programme is printed in Lee, *op cit*, Appendix I

"We watched the [Lancs] contingent winding its serpentine way up the bleak hillside I noticed in the forefront a portly figure, immaculately clad in flock coat and silk hat 'Who is that person?' I inquired, from Tom Maguire 'Why,' said he, 'don't you know?' That's Comrade Hyndman'. A Socialist in a silk hat' Even to-day I still feel unable to forgive Hyndman for the shock I so long ago received by the adornment of his rebellious person with Respectability's hallmark" ¹

The top hat figures in nearly every reminiscence of Hyndman during the early years in this dress he sold *Justice* in the streets, addressed open-air meetings, and earned his livelihood on the Stock Exchange. It symbolized a quite consciously adopted attitude in his propagandist work

"At almost every meeting he addressed, Hyndman would cynically thank the audience for so 'generously supporting my class' Indeed, he brought in 'my class' to an objectionable degree It seemed to some of us that it would have been better if he could have dropped this reference, but none of us doubted his whole-souled advocacy of Socialism as he conceived it." ²

How was it that such a man came to assume the leadership of the modern Socialist movement?

Hyndman, wrote Lenin (who had met him often during his exile in London) was "a bourgeois philistine, who, belonging to the best of his class, eventually struggles through to Socialism but never quite sheds bourgeois conceptions and prejudices" ³ His reading of *Capital*, and his discussions with Marx, had convinced him that a proletarian revolution was inevitable, "whether we like it or not" ⁴ Marx he described as "the Aristotle of the Nineteenth Century", ⁵ and he asserted for himself the role of interpreter and chief apostle of a mechanical "Marxist" dogma Real flexibility, real understanding of the way men make history for themselves, was never present in his writing The working class he tended to regard as the raw material of the revolution, the motive-force which he could harness for his political strategy, rather than as made up of fellow-comrades actively and consciously participating in the struggle. Always the note of Jingoism ran underneath the surface.

¹ *Leds Weekly Citizen*, April 26th, 1929 ² Tom Mann, *Memoirs*, p. 40

³ See *Lenin on Britain* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1941), p. 87

⁴ See Hyndman, *The Social Reconstruction of England* (1884)

⁵ *To-Day*, April, 1889

"There is still not wanting evidence that the English people, under better arrangements, would soon rise to the level of the most glorious periods of our past history. Those very lads who now fall into the dangerous classes from sheer ignorance and bad management—there are, according to the police, at least 300,000 such people in London alone—form, if taken early and thoroughly fed and trained, the flower of our navy. The race is really as capable as ever. In America, in Australia, all the world over, the Anglo-Saxon blood is still second to none."¹

To Edward Carpenter it seemed that Hyndman lived in imminent expectation of revolutionary events, when in a sudden crisis impelled by the spontaneous revolt of suffering and hunger, "the S D F would resolve itself into a Committee of Public Safety, and it would be for him as Chairman of that body to guide the ship of State into the calm haven of Socialism."² Although he was to win the loyal support of a few notable working-class comrades, among them Harry Quelch and Jack Williams, he alienated many hundreds more by his dictatorial manner and sectarian indifference to the wider organizations of the trade union and labour movement. While his books on political theory, and especially his *Historical Basis of Socialism in England* (1883), were arsenals of fact and argument for the pioneers, when he came to express the wider objectives of Socialism, he fell back upon the commonplaces of any middle-class gentleman insensitive to the revolutionary possibilities in man.³

To the inexperienced members of the Democratic Federation in 1882, however, Hyndman's supreme self-confidence, his fluent pen and imposing platform presence, his political contacts and even his ambition appeared as sources of strength. Moreover, his political writings and his expositions of Marxist theory—

¹ *The Coming Revolution in England* (reprinted from the *North American Review*, October, 1882)

² Carpenter, *op cit*, pp. 246-9

³ E.g. compare the following passage of Hyndman with any similar passage from Morris: "What healthy man has not felt a sensation of supreme, inexpressible delight in life as on a brisk spring morning he has gone out amid the song of the birds and the scent of the fresh flowers!—a delight which would be ever recurring if once men and women were really themselves. A climb up a mountain, the view of the sea beating on the reef, the sound of the wind as it rushes through the trees, even these simple pleasures which our successors with their senses fully developed will feel far more keenly than we—are now shut out from the mass of our fellow-creatures", *Social-Democratic Tracts*, No. 1 "The Social-Democrat's Ideal"

faulty as both were—were in advance of any other English work of the time. While some of the prominent Radicals originally associated with the Federation were driven off by the Socialist flavour of *England for All*, and by the vigour of the Federation's agitation against the Irish Coercion Bill, Hyndman gathered around him a group of enthusiasts—among them J. L. Joynes, Jack Williams, Herbert Burrows (who had for some time been active in the London Radical Clubs), Andreas Scheu, and the veterans, Charles and James Murray—who (in Scheu's view) were pushing Hyndman forward rather faster than he wished to go.¹ On May 31st, 1882, a Conference was held at which, for the first time, the Federation passed a distinctively Socialist resolution² and the organization began to lose the taint, which the presence of Hyndman had at first given it, of being "a sort of Tory drag to take the scent off the fox."³ By the end of 1882 the Federation was considered, at least by outsiders, to be a Socialist organization, although it had not as yet adopted any Socialist programme. Hyndman was now thoroughly convinced, not only of the soundness of Marxist theories, but also that the revolution was due to take place in England before all other countries.⁴ It was not until 1883 that the Federation issued its first Socialist pamphlet, *Socialism Made Plain* but in the winter of 1882-3, several Conferences were organized to discuss a series of immediate demands, which would serve as "stepping-stones" to Socialism. These included "the compulsory construction by Public Bodies of healthy dwellings for the people" "free, secular and technical education" the legislative enactment of an eight-hour day cumulative taxation of incomes over £300 public work for the unemployed the repudiation of the National Debt State Appropriation of the railways, and municipal ownership of gas, electricity and water supplies and the nationalization of the land. Thus, when William Morris joined the Democratic Federation in January, 1883, modern Socialism was on its point of emergence from the advanced radicalism of the previous

¹ See Scheu, *op cit*, Part III, Ch. V

² See Lee, *op cit*, p. 48

³ William Morris to C. E. Maurice, June 22nd, 1883, *Letters*, p. 174

⁴ See his table of eight reasons why the Revolution must take place first in England, in *The Coming Revolution in England and The Historical Basis of Socialism in England* (1883), pp. 374-5

decade, and the teething troubles of the new organization were scarcely begun.

IV *The "Oddities"*

William Morris was one of perhaps 200 men and women who took the same step in 1882 and 1883. While the story of the old Chartist guard, of the colony of exiles in London, and of the formation of the small Labour Emancipation League is of interest to the student of William Morris (since Lane and Kitz were to become his close political colleagues), the historical importance of these events should not be over-estimated. They represented a small eddy of ideas, part old, part new, rather than a movement of the masses and this fact goes far to explain the doctrinaire and sectarian outlook of several of the pioneers. Until the new unionism of the later 1880s, the loyalty of the majority of the skilled trade unionists to Gladstonian Liberalism was still unbroken, and the apathy of the masses of the unskilled had scarcely been stirred. It is in the 1880s, rather than in the 1870s, that the full fruition of "Lib-Lab-ism" can be seen. It was in the 1880s that the first working man (Henry Broadhurst) was given a Government position; that the first working men were appointed as magistrates; that local Liberal Parties admitted working men as candidates to School Boards and local Councils. "The great body of working men", MORRIS wrote, recalling the years of pioneering,

"and especially those belonging to the most organized industries were hostile to Socialism: they did not really look upon themselves as a class, they identified their interests with those of their trade-union, their craft, their workshop or factory even: the capitalist system seemed to them, if not heaven-born, yet at least necessary and undoubtedly indefeasible."¹

But, while the pioneers of 1883 could only be counted in tens and twenties, there were among them names which were to figure prominently in the hard propaganda battle of the next few years. While, in Engels' words, the movement was largely proceeding "among 'educated' elements sprung from the bourgeoisie",² a small number of exceptionally gifted working men—

¹ "What We Have to Look For" (March 30th, 1895) *Brit Mus Add MSS* 45334

² *Marx-Engels Sel Cor*, p 419, August 30th, 1883

among them John Burns and Tom Mann, Harry Quelch, a London meat-porter, John Lincoln Mahon, a young Scottish engineer, Robert Banner, a bookbinder, Tom Maguire of Leeds, and Tom Barclay of Leicester—were beginning to take a leading part in the propaganda of ideas. From this time forward, Socialist ideas were to become of increasing influence within the broader working-class movement, so that it is possible to date the effective birth of modern Socialism in Britain from 1883. The working men attracted to the movement in its first years, Morris recalled,

“were there by dint of their special intelligence, or of their eccentricity, not as working-men simply. As a friend once said to me, We are too much a collection of oddities.”¹

And yet their conversion to the Socialist cause was a symptom of those deep upheavals in the economic and political life of Britain which were, in the next few years, to prepare many thousands more for their message.

Britain's age of industrial supremacy had come to a climax in the boom of the two years immediately following the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1. In 1874 she entered a phase, lasting more than twenty years, known as the “Great Depression.” American and German competition was challenging British manufactures in the world market. While Britain's productive capacity increased throughout the period, prices were steadily falling, profit-margins were being cut by increasing competition, and in the worst years, 1879, 1886, and 1893, the symptoms of overproduction appeared. Despite phases of recovery between 1880 and 1882, and 1888 and 1890, British industry as a whole was facing severe problems of readjustment, and in one section after another the figures of unemployment swelled. In agriculture, the flood of imported wheat, and, in the early 1880s, of frozen mutton and beef, proved catastrophic, and thousands were leaving the land, emigrating from the country, or joining the throngs of unemployed in the great towns. The search for new markets, and for new fields of investment, was becoming intensified, and there was a constant pressure by financial and industrial interests for policies of imperialist expansion and aggressive colonial exploitation.

¹ “What We Have to Look For” Brit. Mus. Add. MSS. 45334

It was this ending of English monopoly in the world market which, in Engels' judgement, was the "secret of the sudden—though it has been slowly preparing for three years—but the present sudden emergence of a Socialist movement" in England at the beginning of 1884.¹ And the repercussions of this event in political and social life were instrumental in bringing the "collection of oddities" together. Some were impelled forward by the bankruptcy of the Gladstonian administration in dealing with unemployment and misery at home; others, such as Joynes, H. H. Champion and Morris himself, were impelled by disgust at imperialist policies in Egypt, Africa and Ireland; others, such as Hyndman and Shaw, were impelled in part by their realization that the capitalist system was coming to the end of its term. Once an organized propaganda was afoot, it attracted to it a few of the old guard who had survived the apathy of the previous decade. It gathered refugees like Scheu and Lessner.² Here and there old Chartists, and an occasional Owenite, joined in.³ Wherever there existed any centre of unorthodox thought,

¹ See *Marx-Engels Sel. Cor.*, p. 422.

² For Frederick Lessner, see his *Sixty Years in the Social-Democratic Movement* (1907). A veteran of the struggles of 1848 and succeeding years, he was extremely active in the First International, and a close friend and confidant of Marx and Engels.

³ One of the most notable was John Bedford Leno, the old Chartist leader and poet, who wrote a noble letter to the *Christian Socialist* on New Year's Day, 1885, expressing how he looked to the Socialist movement to consummate the radical ideals of Chartism.

"I began my public life as Chartist and Socialist. I ultimately sank my social views, in order to secure for myself and others Political Freedom. This I hold has now been fairly, if not fully, won. I was prompted to take the course indicated by a belief that it was better to appeal to political freemen than to political slaves. The main points of the Charter having passed into law the question now to be solved is, Will the newly enfranchised lend their power to rid themselves of Social Slavery? I have faith that they will. Old Chartist leaders are dying off rapidly, still, I appeal to the few living now to lend their influence to the new gospel—or rather old gospel—of Socialism. This is necessary in order to make their life-work perfect."

The old Chartist poet, Gerald Massey, contributed occasional poems to Socialist periodicals, and Morris gave him a copy of *The Earthly Paradise*.

The most notable Owenite to join the new propaganda was E. T. Craig "of Ralahine" (see p. 356). Another old Owenite, John Frearson, of Birmingham, joined the Socialist League, writing that he had agreed with its Manifesto "ever since the year 1832." In general the surviving Owenites seem to have been disillusioned or actively hostile to the new propaganda.

recruits might be won for Socialism. They might come from a Secular Society, such as the one described by an observer in 1878

“ A hot discussion was in progress, not on any religious question but on the British government of India. There were fierce statements and counter-statements about such things as Indian land tenure, the caste system and the native money-lenders. What especially impressed me was the red-hot earnestness of the rival orators, and their unsparing denunciation of one another ”¹

Or they might come from a similar Radical Club in London, or from among the members of one of the old Republican Clubs of the 1870s. In a hundred ways, men were taking the first step towards Socialism—Tom Mann reading Carlyle, Ruskin and *Progress and Poverty*, John Burns studying a battered copy of *The Wealth of Nations* in Nigeria, Henry Hyde Champion, the artillery officer, seeing the facts of imperialism for himself in Egypt. In every town and village, the workers faced the facts of exploitation in their daily lives and while a thousand might be beaten down in the struggle, still one, by some miracle of will and courage, might find his way through.

What tool of analysis can be brought to bear to explain the conversion to Socialism of Tom Barclay, the Leicester pioneer? He came from an Irish background, the poorest of the poor. His first recollection was “one of intense fear . . . a little child alone in the upper room of a hovel”.

“My next remembrance is one of disappointment, unsatisfied desire. How low must that state of poverty be in a family where the child has to scratch a brick of the floor with a splinter of slate for want of a pencil. What a monotonous childhood! No toys, no picture-books, no pets, no going ‘ta-ta’! No carpet on the uneven brick floor, no mat, no wall-paper, what poverty! There was neither doctor nor midwife present at my birth. I have heard mother boast that she never needed a midwife. She was very hardy, brought up in the wilds of the ‘county Mayo, God help us!’ After all, why shouldn’t a woman be able to bring forth like cats and cows and other mammals?”²

¹ Malcolm Quinn, *op cit*, p. 62. A description of the Society at Newcastle, which Quinn contrasted with the staid and formal atmosphere at the Leicester Society. Nevertheless, the Leicester Society invited Morris to address it in the 1880s.

² Tom Barclay, *Memoirs and Medleys: The Autobiography of a Bottle-Washer*.

Why not indeed? And why should not children like Tom Barclay, brought up in a "two-roomed crib", the window "not six feet off from the muck hole and the unflushed privies", grow up to be brutes for the service of Capital in their turn? His father, a rag-and-bone man (without even a handcart), his mother leaving the kiddies alone in the house while she went out to sell pen'norths of fire-lighting—he himself was dedicated to the service of Progress at the age of eight, turning a wheel all day for one and sixpence a week. But Tom Barclay was an "oddity". He devoured every book that came his way, he bought or begged a pencil and became a talented draughtsman—a scholar, a writer and a Socialist. From a similar background of Irish Catholicism and poverty another "oddity", Tom Maguire, was to emerge while still in his teens to become the first propagandist of Socialism in the city of Leeds.

Such people defy the calm of analysis, although one day they may inspire an epic poet. Nothing—not the most bitter oppression or the most unrelieved misery of body and mind—can altogether destroy man's aspiration for life, and still more abundant life. The Socialist propaganda brought to such people as these exactly what it had brought to William Morris—hope. Wherever the aspirations for life stirred among the workers—the clear-headed hatred of capitalism, the thirst for knowledge, beauty and fellowship—the Socialist converts might be won. Such converts might seem "oddities", it is true, but it is by such "oddities" as these that history is made, and they were well worth the winning. And it was their new hope which William Morris was to voice.