

CHAPTER VII

TOWARDS A UNITED SOCIALIST PARTY, 1890-1896

I The Kelmscott Press

"I AM not going to retire", Morris wrote to Glasier on December 16th, 1890. "We Hammersmith-ers will be eager to join in any arrangement which would bring us together" Certainly, Morris did not think of his defeat as the signal for his withdrawal from active propaganda. Rather, he felt that by breaking with the Anarchists he had untied his hands for co-operation with the general movement. Before deciding the form which this co-operation might take, he wanted time to look around and take new bearings. Meanwhile, he turned to organizing the half of the League that remained in the new Hammersmith Socialist Society.¹

The "Rules" and "Statement of Principles" of the Hammersmith Society were ratified on January 2nd, 1891. It was declared

"That the object of the Society shall be the spreading of the principles of Socialism, especially by Lectures, Street-Meetings, and Publications, and its funds be applicable to that object only."²

The "Statement of Principles", drafted by Morris, was of a very general character, and marked a low ebb in his usually vigorous style. The new society, it declared, could only be won "by the conscious exertions of those who have learned to know what Socialism is". Both Anarchism and Parliamentarianism were disclaimed, but little was put in their places other than the general aim of "making Socialists"—

"by putting before people, and especially the working-classes, the elementary truths of Socialism, since we feel sure that in spite of the strength in the ranks of labour, there are comparatively few who understand what Socialism is."

¹ The last sound Branch—Aberdeen—followed Hammersmith out (Hammersmith Minutes, January 9th, 1891)

² Hammersmith papers

But there was no attempt in the Statement to represent the Society as holding to the only pure and true Socialist doctrine, or to set it forward as a rival *national* centre to Fabians or S D F Morris was temporizing. There were already perhaps a score of similar independent societies and clubs up and down the country. The formation of the Society ensued the continuance of the active propaganda in the locality, while providing a platform for the discussion of differing Socialist viewpoints. Membership, however, was not strictly limited to local people, and Andreas Scheu, John Carruthers, and Ernest Belfort Bax and several others of Morris's personal friends were among its members.

But—if Morris refused to acknowledge that he was beaten and made no open expression of his feelings—it would be foolish to minimize the bitterness of his defeat. "I have got to rewrite the manifesto for the new Hammersmith Society", he wrote on December 9th—"and that I must do this very night. It is a troublesome and difficult job, and I had so much rather go on with my Saga work."¹ Now, as before, his reflex when faced with disappointment was to plunge himself into other work. The volume of his writing had been growing throughout the previous eighteen months. In the summer of 1890 he had embarked upon the Kelmscott Press in earnest. Now, in January, 1891, his preparations were complete: a cottage was rented close to his Hammersmith home, and the Press was installed.

Notwithstanding this new interest, which was to sustain him for the rest of his life, suddenly, in February, 1891, Morris's health collapsed. More than once before attacks of gout had followed hard upon the heels of some disappointment, and it is reasonable to connect this most serious illness of all with the failure of the League, and with his distress at a new turn for the worse in the condition of his daughter, Jenny. His illness was more grave than has generally been realized, and it may have represented the first onset of the diabetic condition from which he died. In the middle of March, May Morris wrote to Glasier that Morris was still too ill to write. He was "terribly low-spirited", and anxiety over his daughter Jenny had "terribly upset my Father's nerves". On March 27th, her husband, Halliday Sparling, was writing

¹ Mackail, II, p. 240.

"MORRIS is on the mend . . . is now quite cheerful, which is an immense gain. Part of the time he was fearfully depressed, and talked about dying . . . He will write when he can hold a pen comfortably" ¹

By April he was back at his work. "It is a fine thing to have some interesting work to do, and more than ever when one is in trouble—I found that out the other day" ² In May, June and July he spent much time at Folkestone, convalescing from his own illness, and keeping company with Jenny who was recovering from hers. But he was by no means fit. On July 29th he was writing to "Georgie" "I am ashamed to say that I am not as well as I should like, and am even such a fool as to be rather anxious . . ." ³ In August he went with Jenny for a holiday in France (on "doctor's orders") despite his impatience at being taken from his work with the Press, he was refreshed by the journey, writing lengthy architectural commentaries to Emery Walker and Philip Webb ⁴ "I have given myself up to thinking of nothing but the passing day and keeping my eyes open", he wrote from France ⁵ It was not until the autumn that he was fit enough to take up his work with the Press in earnest once again.

The illness left its mark. It is only necessary to compare a photograph of Morris in the late 1880s with one in his last years to see how rapidly he must have aged between 1890 and 1893. No longer did he have that excess of energy which had enabled him to do the business of half a dozen ordinary men. Insofar as he withdrew from active propaganda, it is important to remember that he was *forced* to withdraw by reason of his failing health. The fact that, in his four remaining years of moderate health (1892-5), he still lectured and spoke in the open-air, attended committees and wrote articles for Socialist periodicals, is evidence enough that he did not—as some interpreters have suggested—abandon his militant Socialist beliefs in his final years.

But, for all this, a new mood of resignation was growing upon him. His temper was becoming more equal, his outbursts of rage more rare. He knew that he would not see Socialism in his own life-time. He knew that as a practical leader of the movement he had failed. He had given the best of his mind and energies to the Cause, and now, when he must have known that he had not many

¹ Glasier MSS

² Mackail, II, p. 256.

³ *Letters*, pp. 338-9

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 341 ff

⁵ Mackail, II, p. 261

more years to live, he allowed himself to indulge in his pleasures. Once again he attended sales of manuscripts and early printed books, and added to his collection. Both his last prose romances (see p 781 f) and his work with the Kelmscott Press were undertaken in this mood.

The Kelmscott Press, about which much has already been written by experts,¹ was founded in a different spirit from that in which the original Firm had been launched thirty years before. Morris now had no thought of reforming the world through his art, and little thought of reforming contemporary printing and book production. Indeed, he did not seek to justify his pleasure in any way. The Press was simply a source of delight and relaxation, in which his craft as designer and his craft as a writer both found expression. His son-in-law, Halliday Sparling, who was closely associated with the venture, described the Press as "a personal experiment to see what could be done *at his own expense* in the way of producing a decent book".² It was his intention at first neither to publish nor to sell the books, but only to work at the designing of type and at printing as a private hobby. In the outcome, the high cost of his experiments made it essential that he should recoup some of his losses by publishing a limited edition of each work. The prices of the books were prohibitive for the general public. "When he has paid a high price for his paper", Frank Colebrook recalled,

"hand-made from the linen shirts of certain peasants, when he has used black ink at about 10 shillings a pound, when he has designed his three types and had them cut, when he has paid fair wages to his workmen, from whom he does not require a longer week than 46½ hours—nor, indeed, bind them down to any specified time—he is not able to sell the product of all this for a less sum".³

¹ See Vallance, *op cit*, pp 376 f, Mackail, II, pp 247 f, William Morris, "The Ideal Book" (May Morris, I, pp 310–17), *Three Papers on William Morris*, ed Holbrook Jackson (Shenval Press, 1934), *The Kelmscott Press and William Morris, Master-Craftsman* (1934), by H. Halliday Sparling, *An Annotated List of All the Books Printed at the Kelmscott Press*, by Sir Sidney Cockerell (Hammersmith, 1898), *A Note by William Morris on His Aims in Founding the Kelmscott Press Together with a Short History and Description of the Press* (1898), by Sir Sidney Cockerell, *De la Typographie et l'Harmonie de la Page imprimée William Morris et son influence sur Les Arts et Métiers* (1898), by C. Ricketts and L. Pissarro.

² H. H. Sparling, *op cit*, p 77.

³ Frank Colebrook, *William Morris, Master Printer*, p 10.

As each new book came off the Press, he dissipated any possible profit by distributing copies among his closest friends. "You see I do the books mainly for you and one or two others", he wrote to Philip Webb in August, 1894.¹ With the exception of one small job for the new London County Council, Morris executed no outside orders at the Press. The atmosphere of the place was rather that of a studio than of a business. Entering the Press once, Morris found the foreman, Mr Bowden, "in the depth of dismay". A long deal slab with dozens of page formes on it had collapsed, and all the type was pied. Morris regarded the disaster with equanimity. "Oh then," he remarked, "this is what you call 'pie' . . . Ah well, we must put it straight. I came up to tell you that you must take a holiday on May 1st, Labour Day . . ."²

In October, 1892, Morris cancelled an engagement to lecture in Glasgow, writing "At present the absolute *duties* of my life are summed up in the necessity for taking care of my wife and daughter . . . My *work* of all kinds is really simply an amusement taken when I can out of my duty time."³ The Kelmscott Press proved to be the perfect form of creative relaxation for him in his last years, since he could continue with his designing even when in poor health or confined to bed. The scale of his work was so costly, and his favourite Gothic type was so unfamiliar, that his work could not have an immediate influence upon popular book production. "Morris's achievement", in the view of Mr Gerald Crow, "is more conspicuously that of having awakened general interest in the production of volumes beautiful in every feature (including an appropriate type and an insistence upon well-proportioned margins), than of having contributed to type-design as an independent and specialised art."⁴

This stimulus to general interest provided by the Press was probably the greatest single factor in the revival of fine printing, both in England and in Europe, in succeeding years.

So, with his work at the Press, visits to Kelmscott Manor, work on the prose romances and his translations, and occasional propaganda for the Socialist movement or for Anti-Scrape, he passed his last few years. The intense nervous energy which had

¹ *Letters*, p. 361

² Frank Colebrook, *op cit*, p. 30

³ Glasier MSS

⁴ Gerald Crow, *William Morris, Designer* (1934), p. 101

sustained him through the 1880s was flagging, and was giving way to a note of peace unknown in his life before, and given expression in some verses written for his old bed at Kelmscott Manor in the summer of 1891

"I am old and have seen
Many things that have been,
Both grief and peace
And wane and increase
No tale I tell
Of ill or well,
But this I say,
Night treadeth on day,
And for worst and best
Right good is rest "

II Goodbye to the Anarchists

Despite his recent illness, from which he had scarcely recovered, Morris was present at London's May Day in 1891. He spoke, not at a splinter meeting as in the year before, but at the main demonstration of May the Third. Aveling was Chairman of his platform, and Cunningham Graham, Shaw, and Harry Quelch (of the S D F) spoke beside him, while Engels, a spectator, sat on the platform. This was symbolic of the direction of his last years of work for the Cause.

On his return from France, at the end of August, he resumed his Socialist activities, but on a diminished scale. In October he was lecturing, on the first principles of Socialism, to Charles Rowley's Society in Ancoats, Manchester. But, for the greater part of the next year, his activities were limited to his own society at Hammersmith. It was certainly in a healthy state. A regular audience of between forty and seventy attended its Sunday lectures. In addition a monthly discussion meeting was held, and at the weekly business meetings, which Morris usually attended,¹ twenty and more members were regularly present. Throughout the year, summer and winter, the open-air stands were kept open, with a regular audience of 300 at the Hammersmith Bridge site. Morris was still a frequent open-air speaker, sometimes

¹ Of seventy-five business meetings between January, 1891, and June, 1892, Morris was present at forty—a high percentage if his illness and his visit to France are taken into account (Hammersmith Minutes)

carrying the banner and platform himself to the Bridge or to the Latimer Road arches. With *Commonweal* now a monthly Anarchist broadsheet, the Society sought for another paper to sell at their propaganda meetings. *Justice* was passed over in favour of the *Labour Leader* (Keir Hardie's paper), and then for Burgess's *Workman's Times*. Early in 1892 both of these were given up in favour of Robert Blatchford's more forthright Socialist paper, the *Clarion*. Meanwhile, in October, 1891, the Society commenced publication of a small four-page monthly, the *Hammersmith Socialist Record*, edited by Sam Bullock. No attempt was made to sell this to the general public: it was intended only to serve as a means of communication among the members of the Society, and with other independent societies and clubs, and it contained each month some comment upon passing events by Morris, Bullock, Scheu, Glasier or some other member.

The Hammersmith Socialist Society provided a platform where every opinion within the movement could find expression. Lecturers in 1891, 1892 and the first three months of 1893 included Morris (eight times), Hyndman (twice), Keir Hardie (February, 1893), Shaw (three times), Scheu, Stuart Headlam, Bax, Graham Wallas, Carruthers, Edouard Bernstein, Shaw Maxwell, Robert Banner, Sidney Olivier, Stepniak, Herbert Burrows, D. J. Nicoll, Tom Mann and many others. In October, 1891, the Society took some provisional steps towards giving support to a candidate of the Chelsea S.D.F. in the School Board elections, but relations were later broken off. Slowly Morris was beginning to shed his purist attitudes, and to revive in spirit.

Ever since that day of bright sunshine in April, 1887, when Morris had addressed the striking Northumbrian miners, he had been particularly responsive to events in the coalfields. Here he had caught a glimpse of the true face of the British working-class, and had gained a sense of the tremendous power of the organized workers in action. In the London streets he saw only the fragments, "ground down by the life of our easy-going hell". The great strikes of 1890 had won his immediate enthusiasm. Now, in 1892 and 1893, further great strikes in the coalfields helped him to complete his own "education". In his comments of 1890 he well understood the miners' power, but he suggested that their knowledge "of what to claim" must come from the independent

Socialist propaganda outside their own ranks In April, 1892, writing in the *Hammeismuth Socialist Record*, he expressed clearly for the first time the importance of the educative role of the struggle itself After pointing to the half-hearted "Lib-Lab" leadership of the miners, he continued

"The conduct of the labour war under its present purblind guidance and weak organization will teach the workers by hard necessity Their very mistakes will force them into looking into the facts of their position, their gains will show them how wretchedly they live still, their losses will show them that they must take the responsibility of their labour and lives on their own shoulders They will learn that there is no necessity for masters, and therefore that the masters need not be paid at the dire price to the workers of their foregoing all the pleasure and dignity of life And then they will use the power which all are now beginning to see that they have got, and true Society will be born "

Two months later, in June, 1892, reports of the suffering among the miners and their families in Durham and Cleveland, caused him to regret, not the strike, but the fact that the strike was not under Socialist leadership and for Socialist aims

"If the strike is a mere limited business dispute of the men with the masters, the price is altogether too high

"If the strikers were striking as Socialists, and a large proportion of the working-classes were intelligent Socialists, such miseries need not be The expenses of the war could easily be met by a self-imposed tax, which undoubtedly they would be willing enough to pay if they saw that any strike were but a part of the universal strike, which in some form or another, though not in the formal way of the old Chartists' Holy Month, *must* be the weapon of the worker in the long run The Cleveland workers are not suffering from a *strike*, but from the *incompleteness* of a strike, from the fact that it is a trade strike and not a Socialist one "

If Morris was coming closer towards Engels's position, events were placing a gulf between him and his former comrades of the League After November, 1890, the remaining "Leftists", such as Kitz, Tochatt and Mainwaring, were quickly swamped by the pronounced Anarchists The innate tendency of the Anarchists towards the liquidation of all organization ensured that the League, as a national organization, did not survive after February, 1891 Morris, before leaving, had paid up all debts to the end of 1890, leaving the type, plant and copyright of *Commonweal*,

without any liabilities, in the hands of the Council. For a month or two, indeed, he seems to have hoped that the Hammersmith Society might continue selling the paper at their own propaganda meetings.¹ But it was obvious within a few weeks that this would be impossible. Angry replies to "Where are We Now?" by Dr Creaghe (of Sheffield) and Charles Mowbray in the issue of November 29th revealed only too clearly that Morris had got out of the League only just in time. Creaghe advocated "really revolutionary action" to "show our contempt for what is called private property".

"Every man should take what he requires of the wealth around him, using violence whenever necessary, and when dragged before his enemies he should tell them plainly that he has done what he knows to be right."

"I feel confident", wrote Mowbray, "that a few determined men could paralyse the forces of our masters." The means, he suggested, were "gatlings, hand-grenades, strychnine, and lead". Everywhere there are signs of the *bloody* conflict which is about to take place between the workers and their masters. Dynamite, above all, was the weapon for revolutionaries "the people could carry it around in their pockets . . . and destroy whole cities and whole armies." Thereafter *Commonweal* became once again a monthly. In February, 1891, it was announced as the property of the newly-formed "London Socialist League"; in May it was subtitled, "A Revolutionary Journal of Anarchist Communism". The formation of the London League did not mean the complete extinction of all provincial support. groups of Anarchists still persisted in Walsall, Leicester, Glasgow, Norwich, Hull, Leeds and, above all, Sheffield. Rather, it signified an intensification of the process by which every Anarchist constituted himself into "a committee of one".

"Hurrah! for the kettle, the club, and the poker,
Good medicine always, for landlord and broker . . ."

So carolled D. J. Nicoll and the "moderate" section of the old League (Mainwaring, Mowbray, John Turner and W. B. Parker)

¹ Discussing a possible general Socialist newspaper with Glasier on December 16th, 1890, he wrote "I would do nothing in it as long as *Commonweal* exists, I would rather support that if I could" (Glasier, *op cit*, p. 206)

when advertising a "No Rent" meeting in July, 1891, on a hand-bill headed "MURDER!"¹ In the next few years a rash of Anarchism was to appear in one major city after another. It took all sorts of shapes and colours: there was the sober group around Kropotkin and Edward Carpenter, who published *Freedom*, there was the studious and restrained old friend of Morris, the tailor, James Tochatti, who lived at Carmagnole House, Railway Approach, Hammersmith, and who (after 1893) edited *Liberty*, there was the old Autonomie Club, in Windmill Street, where foreign refugees hatched real conspiracies: the Jewish Anarchist Club in Berners Street, the Scandinavian Club, in Rathbone Place, the Christian Anarchists, the Associated Anarchists, the Collectivist Anarchists, Socialist Anarchists, the followers of Albert Tarn and those of Benjamin Tucker, the Individualist Anarchists and the plain jail-birds. Papers published, on blue paper, red paper, and toilet paper, ranged from the *Anarchist*, *Commonweal*, *Alarm* and *Sheffield Anarchist*, to the *Firebrand*, *Revenge*, *British Nihilist* and Dan Chatterton's *Atheistic Communistic Scorchers*. Some of these groups and papers, of course, represented no one and nothing, except a game of political musical chairs played by half a dozen fanatics. Others, like the "Commonweal Group" (which was all that remained of the London Socialist League by the end of 1891) were initiated by genuine "Leftists" pushed by their isolation and impatience over the border into the wilderness.

It would be impossible to understand the vagaries of sincere and self-sacrificing Socialists like Sam Mainwaring, James Tochatti and Fred Charles,² unless one fact is recognized: the Anarchist groupings were now deeply penetrated by spies, and deliberately used by *agents-provocateurs* to discredit the wider movement. In France this process went so far that one Anarchist journal was actually subsidized by the police. It is doubtful whether the British police ever troubled to go so

¹ W. C. Hart, *Confessions of an Anarchist* (1906), p. 41.

² Associates of these three men always spoke very highly of their personal qualities, e.g. for Mainwaring, see Tom Mann, *Memoirs*, p. 47; for Fred Charles, see Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p. 132. "No surrender or sacrifice for the 'cause' was too great for him, and as to his own earnings [as clerk] he practically gave them all away to tramps or the unemployed." Nicoll paid a similar tribute to Charles's generosity and single-heartedness in *The Walsall Anarchists*.

far as this, but undoubtedly by 1890 they were learning from their Continental colleagues. The Anarchists (they were learning) could create dissension far out of proportion to their small numbers. In 1890 the Anarchist Leaguers were physically driven off by the dockers, after bringing their red flag and their bluster to a dockers' demonstration.¹ In Sheffield, Leeds, Nottingham and other cities, the Anarchist Communists aroused disgust among the workers by advocating immediate forcible actions, or the "propaganda by deed." The fact that prosecutions were infrequent needs no explanation. It was in the interests of the police to prosecute only when their agents had succeeded in manufacturing a "conspiracy" which would provide a Nine Days' Wonder in the Press.

Such an occasion was reached in February, 1892. The agent in this case was Auguste Coulon, who had been connected with the French Possibilists, had worked for a few months within the Social Democratic Society in Dublin, and had come to England, joining the North Kensington Branch (an offshoot and close relation of the Hammersmith Branch) of the League in January, 1890. He posed as a militant Anarchist, wrote stirring and convincing "International Notes" for *Commonweal*, and visited the Hammersmith Branch frequently, selling copies of *L'Indicateur Anarchiste*, a terrorist manual (compiled, it is said, by a French detective) containing instructions on the making of bombs and dynamite. He joined the Autonomie Club, and imposed upon the noble Anarchist refugee, Louise Michel, who was running a school in Fitzroy Square. As Louise Michel's assistant he appeared to other Anarchists to be above suspicion.

In 1891, after Morris had left the League, Coulon got to work in earnest, and there is no doubt that he had assistants in his work. He approached Nicoll to commence the "propaganda by deed" (theft), but was rebuffed. He won the confidence of

¹ *Commonweal*, August 30th, 1890. The incident reveals the whole truth about the futility of the League in its last days. "Several of our comrades attended the Dockers' Demonstration. At this meeting we had a strange experience. A meeting was started by us, and some reference made by us to the fact that the New Unionism was due to the work of the Socialists, but that now those who have benefited by their work shrink from the name of Socialist, and would wear anything but red as a badge, the dockers intolerantly refused to hear this lecture and broke up the meeting."

Fred Charles, accompanied him to Sheffield, where, with Dr Creaghe, he published some numbers of the *Sheffield Anarchist*. In July, 1891, he found his way to Walsall, where he got into touch with a tiny Socialist Club of Anarchist complexion, and got on to friendly terms with John Westley, a brush-manufacturer, and the Secretary, Deakin, who worked in an iron foundry. Returning to London, he sent a French Anarchist refugee, Victor Cailes, down to Walsall, asking the comrades to look after him and find him some work. A few weeks later a letter reached Cailes, signed "Degnal", and including a sketch of a bomb which he was asked to manufacture. Cailes wrote to Coulon, who informed him that the request was authentic, and that the bombs were being made for use by the Russian Nihilists. Cailes and Fred Charles, who was now in Walsall, agreed to do what they could.

Meanwhile, Coulon was hard at work in London. In August, 1891, a "Revolutionary Conference" was held in the Jewish Anarchist Club in Berneis Street. Coulon was present, advocating the formation of chemistry classes, to study the making of explosives, and several such groups of "mere boys" were formed. Nicoll, the Editor, and Mowbray, the publisher of *Commonweal*, were invited to join, but both (on their own evidence) declined. Nevertheless, they allowed Coulon to continue writing his "International Notes", in which he showered praise on every terrorist attempt abroad. "No voice speaks so loud as Dynamite", he wrote in December, 1891, "and we are glad to see it is getting into use all over the place." His example was infectious, other comrades tried to outdo him by the fury of their bluster. In the last months of 1891 the *Commonweal* openly advocated theft, train-robbery, assassination, the sacking of warehouses and of jewellers' shops and indiscriminate terrorism. Later, even Nicoll came to understand how he had been duped.

"Thus the great conspiracy was worked up. Violent paragraphs in *The Commonweal*, a book on explosives in the Press [Johann Most's latest production], the bombs at Walsall, Nitro-Glycerine in the hands of a mere child in London. Voilà the widespread conspiracy of which Mr. A. Young, the council for the Treasury, spoke in an awestruck tone at the commencement of the case. Coulon understood his trade."

¹ D. J. Nicoll, *The Walsall Anarchists—Trapped by the Police*

So it was that the great Walsall Anarchist Case was sprung on the public in February, 1892. Coulon, in December, 1891, and January, 1892, sent urgent messages to Deakin to *hurry up*. Jean Battola, an Italian shoemaker, was sent from London to Walsall to get the bomb. From this time onwards, the Walsall group were shadowed. Deakin, sent by Cailes with a bottle of chloroform to London, was shadowed to the Autonomie Club, where he was arrested. The arrest of Fred Charles, Cailes, Westley, Battola and another Walsall anarchist implicated in the bomb manufacture, Ditchfield, followed in the early days of January. Coulon, denounced by his colleagues, disappeared into hiding in London, his brother admitted in an ungarded moment that Coulon had for two years been in the pay of the police. In prison, Deakin was brought to confess the whole "conspiracy" after the police had staged the voices of a bogus "confession" of his supposed comrades in the next cell. The authorities took their revenge. Despite the fact that all evidence pointed to Coulon as the real instigator, despite the fact that there was no evidence of any overt act beyond the making of the bomb which Charles and Deakin seem genuinely to have believed was meant for Russia, and despite the fact that the defence solicitor, Thompson, extracted from Chief-Inspector Melville the admission that he "had paid lots of Anarchists money",¹ savage sentences of ten years' penal servitude were passed on Charles, Cailes and Battola, five years on Deakin, while only Westley and Ditchfield were acquitted.

The Press had their Nine Days' Wonder, and used the occasion to the utmost. Nicoll rushed to the defence of his comrades with a mixture of courage and stupidity. He published in *Commonweal* on April 9th, 1892, an article ("Are these men fit to live?"), which could hardly fail to be interpreted as inciting to the murder of the Judge in the Walsall Case, and of Chief Inspector Melville. On April 18th, the police raided the *Commonweal* office, effectively suppressing a number of the paper which exposed Coulon's part in the "conspiracy". Nicoll and Mowbray were arrested, and held jointly responsible for the article of April 9th. "You will be sorry to see", Morris wrote to his daughter on the 21st, "that Nicoll and Mowbray, two of our

¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, February 10th, 1892

old comrades, have got into trouble with the *Commonweal*. It was very stupid of Nicoll, for it seems that he stuck in his idiotic article while Mowbray was away, so that the latter knew nothing of it. I think Mowbray will get off. I am sorry for him, and even for the *Commonweal*.¹ Mowbray's wife had died a day or two before the arrest, and he was refused permission to attend the funeral, until Morris came before the Court and entered into surety for him for £500.² In the event, Nicoll was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment. With all his faults, he was no coward, and he succeeded in carrying on the fight for Fred Charles and his other comrades from prison. Mowbray was made of different metal, and when he was acquitted he disappeared from the movement. Around his name there hung the charge that he, himself, had been in relations with the police—a charge which may have been based only on his acquittal, but which is not beyond the bounds of possibility.³

It was one thing for Morris to come to the aid of an old comrade in circumstances of distress. But, whatever his personal feelings, it was of the first importance that he should not appear to condone the Anarchist folly which had been so deliberately engineered to discredit the Left. In the *Hammersmith Socialist Record* for May, 1892, he made his position plain enough.

"It is difficult to express in words strong enough the perversity of the idea that it is possible for a minority to carry on a war of violence against an overwhelming majority without being utterly crushed. There is no royal road to revolution or the change in the basis of society. To make the workers conscious of the disabilities which beset them, to make them conscious of the dormant power in them for the removal of these disabilities, to give them hope and an aim and organization to carry out their aspirations. Here is work enough for the most energetic. It is the work of patience, but nothing can take the place of it. And moreover *it is being done*, however slowly, however imperfectly."

In February, 1893, when he delivered before the Hammersmith Society a lecture on "Communism", he turned aside to emphasize the same point.

"As to the attempt of a small minority to terrify a vast majority

¹ Mackail, II, p. 238.

² Vallance, *op cit*, p. 357.

³ Guy Aldred in *Dogmas Discarded*, II, p. 67, says Mowbray continued as an Anarchist agitator into the 1900s, and ended as "a mere political adventurer" organizing Australian emigration schemes.

into accepting something which they do not understand, by spasmodic acts of violence, mostly involving the death or mutilation of non-combatants, I can call that nothing else than sheer madness. And here I will say once for all, what I have often wanted to say of late, that the idea of taking any human life for any reason whatsoever is horrible and abhorrent to me"¹

No doubt, when he wrote this passage, the increasing number of Anarchist outrages on the Continent (see p 686) was in his mind. But in England as well, "militant" Anarchism was not ended by the Walsall Case, indeed, there is reason to believe that the police themselves, well satisfied with the Walsall haul, for several years assisted in keeping the embers alive. The immediate effect of Walsall upon the remaining old Leaguers, who were not frightened out of the movement, was to make them suspect any and every colleague, and thereby to loosen their organization and make its penetration by spies all the more easy. "Down with the Politicians!" declared a leaflet issued in support of *Commonweal*.

"In the struggle which is near at hand any weapon is justifiable, but we must beware of *traitors* and *spies*—trust your life in no man's hands. Keep your own secrets, *individual initiative* will paralyze the efforts and successfully defy the political pimps who seek to entrap you. Let Hope supplant Despair, Courage—Cowardice, there is even now a rumbling in the distance, and revolt everywhere—the storm-cloud thickens, as Englishmen then let us not be the last but the first to help on this great human tidal wave now setting toward the goal of HUMAN EMANCIPATION."

This was not Frank Kitz's work—he had pulled out some time before, burning the minute books of the League when he left.² Nor is it in the style of Mainwaring or Tochatti, who were both, in their own ways, responsible men. *Commonweal* now appeared over the name of an old member of the League Council, T Cantwell, and with unsigned articles "The day when a Government depot of ammunition", declared an article entitled "Revolution and Physical Force" on August 6th, 1892, "can be safely and suddenly made to vanish into the hands of those who will use it in self defence—the prestige of the State will

¹ Morris prepared two lectures on Communism in 1892 and 1893. One was published after his death as Fabian Tract No 113, and in *Works*, Vol XXIII. The other is in Brit Mus Add MSS 45334.

² Recollection of the late Mr Ambrose Barker.

have received a shock from which it will find it hard to recover”
How true!

The name “Commonweal” persisted off and on for several more years, but the old League was splitting into smaller and smaller factions. Nicoll, on his release from prison, engaged in bitter polemic with his old comrades, who would not permit him to resume the editorship of the paper.¹ He was now a pathetic figure: his morbid tendencies had begun to unbalance his mind, he surrounded his life in imaginary conspiracy, and his conversation returned again and again to the subject of police spies. To his credit, he never gave up the fight for his imprisoned comrades. He resumed the editorship of a spasmodic *Commonweal*, hawking it at meetings to gain a wretched livelihood. Later, he sold pitiful, child-like stories scrawled in coloured crayons, in return for which old comrades and sympathizers gave him donations, until his life ended in St Pancras Workhouse in 1919.²

The remaining Anarchist Communists scattered in different directions, Kitz, Turner, Mainwaring and Tochattı all playing a more sober part on the extreme left-wing of the movement.³ Once more Morris went into Court to help one of his old comrades—this time Tom Cantwell, in July, 1894, who had been charged with “soliciting the murder of members of the Royal Family.”⁴ Only with Tochattı, at Hammersmith, did he remain

¹ See David Nicoll, *The Greenwich Mystery* and *The Ghosts of Chelmsford Jail*, strangely earnest and unbalanced accounts of persecution and treachery.

² Recollections of the late Mr. Ambrose Barker, and Guy Aldred, *Dogmas Discarded*, II, pp. 67–8.

³ Frank Kitz remained active on the extreme left wing of the movement until shortly before his death in 1923, at the age of about seventy-four, his last years were spent in considerable poverty (obituary in *Justice*, January 20th, 1923). John Turner was well-known for his work as Secretary of the Shop Assistants’ Union. Sam Mainwaring removed to Swansea in 1891, formed the Swansea Socialist Society, and later returned to London, where he died while addressing an open-air meeting on Parliament Hill Fields on September 29th, 1907 (Mann, *Memoirs*, p. 47). Tochattı edited *Liberty* in the 1890s.

⁴ Several days after Carnot was assassinated in Paris, the Prince and Princess of Wales opened Tower Bridge (June 29th, 1894). Cantwell and Charles Quinn held an open-air meeting near the bridge, selling a pamphlet, *Why Vaillant Threw the Bomb*. When arrested, Cantwell, the compositor of *Commonweal*, had letters on him showing the paper to be on its last legs (*The Times*, July 31st and August 1st, 1894).

on friendly personal terms In December, 1893, Tochatti asked Morris to write an article for his *Liberty* During the previous two years a series of Anarchist outrages had taken place on the Continent, in 1892 the notorious Ravachol was arrested after several explosions in Paris, in October, 1892, the Mayor of Chicago was assassinated, an attempt was made to blow up the Spanish Cortes, and a bomb was placed in front of the offices of the Carmaux Mining Company In 1893, at Barcelona, a bomb was thrown in the Liceo Theatre, killing about twenty of the audience, in Paris a bomb was thrown in the French Chamber of Deputies by August Vaillant, and, late in the year, there were further incidents in Spain and Italy These were the circumstances in which Morris wrote to Tochatti his reply on December 12th, 1893

"My dear Tochatti,

"I do not remember having promised to contribute to your paper, though I do remember promising to write a pamphlet for you In any case however considering the attitude which some anarchists are taking up about the recent anarchist murders, and attempts to murder, I could not in conscience allow anything with my name attached to it to appear in an anarchist paper, (as I understand yours is to be) unless you publish in said paper a distinct repudiation of such monstrosities

"Here I might make an end, but since we have been in friendly association, I will ask you if you do not think you ought for your own sake as (I should hope) a person holding views which may be reasonably argued about [*'against'* deleted], to repudiate the use of means which can bring with them nothing but disaster to the cause of liberty For your own sake and for those who honestly think that the principles of anarchy are right For I cannot for the life of me see how such principles, which propose the abolition of compulsion, can admit of promiscuous slaughter as a means of converting people

"However I don't for a moment suppose that you agree with such '*propaganda by deed*' But since I don't think so, that is the very reason why I think you should openly say that you don't

"Yours very truly,

"William Morris"¹

Tochatti gave the repudiation Morris asked for, and Morris, in his turn, fulfilled his part of the bargain by allowing him to

¹ First published in A Compton Rickett, *William Morris A Study* The MS is in the Walthamstow collection, and I have made one or two minor corrections from it.

print "Why I am a Communist" in *Liberty*, and, later, to reprint it as a pamphlet. In May, 1895, Tochatti secured from Morris a further article for *Liberty*, "As to Bribing Excellence"¹

In 1894 the first pathetic action of the Anarchists in England took place—a French member of the Autonomie Club, Martial Bourdin, blew himself up on his way to destroy (it was supposed) the Royal Observatory at Greenwich. As for Morris, his final opinions on the Anarchist movement were given in an interview with *Justice* on January 27th, 1894.

"I regard it as simply a disease—a social disease caused by the evil conditions of society. I cannot regard it in any other light. Of course, as a Socialist I regard the Anarchists—that is, those who believe in Anarchism pure and simple—as being diametrically opposed to us."

"You are not opposed to insurrectionary methods simply because they are insurrectionary?" he was asked, and he replied:

"No, but because they are inexpedient. Here in England, at any rate, it would be simply madness to attempt anything like an insurrection. Anarchism, as a theory, negatives society, and puts man outside it. Now, man is unthinkable outside society. Man cannot live or move outside it. This negation of society is the position taken up by the logical Anarchists, and this leads to the spasmodic insurrectionary methods which they advocate."

In the pitiful career of Nicoll and his friends, did he see a caricature of the path along which his own purist views had once been leading him? Possibly he did. For, at the same time as he was making these final rejections of Anarchism, he was also swallowing his pride, and turning his back on his old "anti-parliamentary" position.

III The Rejection of Purism

"What do you think of the L C C election?" Morris asked Glasier, in March, 1892.

"I am pleased on the whole. It is certainly the result of the Socialist movement, and is a Labour victory, as the affair was worked by the Socialist and Labour people. Of course, I don't think much of gas-and-water Socialism, or indeed of any mere mechanical accessories to

¹ Published in May Morris, II, pp. 524-7.

Socialism, but I can see that the spirit of the thing is bettering, and in spite of all disappointments I am very hopeful”¹

In the elections the Progressives—an alliance of the London Liberal and Radical Union, the Metropolitan Radical Federation, trade unions, nonconformist bodies, and Fabians—had won the victory, with six Fabian candidates (including the twenty-four-year-old ex-Leaguer, Fred Henderson) securing election. The S D F, which had conducted an independent campaign, had secured some fair-sized votes. Slowly the propagandist work of ten years was beginning to take solid organizational form. In the North, the I L P was taking shape, and the independent labour unions were coming into being. In London the Fabians were the first Socialist grouping to win any effective following of voters. In the previous year over 25,000 copies of the cheap edition of *Fabian Essays* had been sold. In Hammersmith they were making a determined effort to establish a strong group, and very possibly Shaw and his friends hoped that Morris’s disillusion in the League would throw him into their arms. Notable converts were made. Halliday Sparling (once as extreme a Leftist as the League contained), Sam Bullock (the Editor of the *Hammersmith Record*), Ernest Radford, Walter Crane, A. Beasley and (later) May Morris herself—all prominent members of the Hammersmith Socialist Society. In the provinces, too, in the two years preceding the formation of the I L P, remarkable events were taking place in the Fabian Society. Old Leaguers—Leonard Hall in Manchester, Tom Maguire and Alf Mattison in Leeds—had, in default of any other organization, joined the Society, and were promoting working-class groups in their areas. Such groups did not indicate conversions to Fabian theory, but, rather, the reverse, and the process caused some disquiet to the London managers of the Society. During 1893 nearly all these working-class provincial groups were absorbed into the I L P, and the Fabian Annual Report for 1894 breathed an almost audible sigh of relief.

In the *Record* for August, 1892, Morris commented at greater length on the general development of the movement, as evidenced by the General Election, in which Keir Hardie was returned for West Ham, John Burns for Battersea, and J. Havelock Wilson (the seamen’s leader) for Middlesbrough. In addition, thirteen

¹ *Letters*, p. 349.

"Lib -Lab " candidates had been returned, Ben Tillett, fighting both Liberal and Conservative at East Bradford, had come within a few hundred of victory, and on Morris's home ground at Hammersmith, Frank Smith, standing as independent Labour, had polled 3,718 against the Conservative's 4,387. Morris withdrew none of his previous comments upon the institution of Parliament—"an institution which would be a permanent and striking failure, if it were the business of parliament *to do anything*, but which, as it is the business of parliament *to do nothing*, must be considered a very fair success." Once again, he spoke of "the cowardice, irresolution, chicanery, and downright lies in action, which after a little swamp all parliaments." But the election itself he thought remarkable for one thing, "the weight that the instincts of the working men *as working men* have had in the polling." The Labour Party of three would be able to do nothing but their election was "significant of the change which is coming over working-class opinion, for they *must* be looked on by everyone not blinded by party politics as a protest against the organized hypocrisy of the two great (?) political parties . "

"For us Socialists this obvious move forward of the class-feeling is full of real hope, for we cannot doubt that it is the result of the last ten years of Socialist agitation. Now once more it is incumbent on the Socialists whose ideas of Socialism are clear, who know what they are aiming at, to clear the essentials of Socialism from the mere passing accidents of the new form of the struggle between labour and capital. It is our business to show the workers that the essential thing is not an improved administrative machinery not a more perfect form of joint-stock enterprise than at present not a system of understanding between masters and men which would raise wages when the markets were good not mere amelioration of the condition of certain groups of labour, necessarily at the expense of others not to level down and level up till we are all of us sharing in a poor life, stripped of energy, without art, research or pleasure. But that the essence of our aim is the destruction of property of all kinds, by means of the organization of work *for the benefit of the workers only, and each and all of them*. Rise of wages, shortening of hours of labour, better education, etc., all these things are good, even in themselves, but unless they are used as steps towards equality of condition, the inconvenience they will cause to the capitalists will be met by changes in the markets, and in the methods of production, which will make the gains of the workers mere names . . .

"The workers have to chose between slavery, however its chains may be gilded and freedom—that is, equality political and economic. When the workers understand that this is their true aim, every step they take will be a real gain, never to be taken from them"

Close as these expressions were to his earlier views, they mark a definite stage in the evolution of his opinions. Now, for the first time, he was prepared to acknowledge the importance of the fight for limited gains, of "steps" on the road to Socialism, provided that they were fought for with a revolutionary aim kept steadily in view, and with determination not to lose the gains once won. In his first lecture on "Communism", he at last retracted from his anti-parliamentary position

"I am no great lover of political tactics, the sordid squabble of an election is unpleasant enough for a straightforward man to deal in yet I cannot fail to see that it is necessary somehow to get hold of the machine which has at its back the executive power of the country, however that may be done. And that the organization and labour which will be necessary to effect that by means of the ballot box will be little indeed compared with what would be necessary to effect it by open revolt"¹

Slowly he was feeling his way to a new position.

It was not easy for him. His direct contacts with the North were now few. At Whitsun, 1892, Alf Mattison of Leeds called at the Clubroom, and Morris, hearing that an old Leeds Leaguer was there, paced the garden with him for an hour, questioning him closely about events in Yorkshire, the New Unionism, and the position of Tom Maguire.² The *Clarion* helped him to understand the change that was in the air. But in his own Society he was still at a disadvantage. On the one hand, there was a group of comrades who had learned their "anti-parliamentarism" so thoroughly at his feet that they had come to accept it as an inflexible doctrine for every circumstance. On the other, the parliamentary members of the Society were already being drawn into Fabian channels. He had no desire to fight the matter to an issue within his own Society, only to emerge at the end with a new sect of Morrisian parliamentary revolutionaries! His own position now approximated more closely to that of the S D F, so far as

¹ Brit Mus Add MSS 45334

² Notebooks of Alf Mattison and *Labour Echo*, November, 1896

theory was concerned, than at any time since 1885. But, had he swallowed his own pride (as he was ready to do), and rejoined the Federation, the Hammersmith Society would have fallen into two or more parts in a matter of weeks. More important than this, he could see how the arrogant, dogmatic tone bred into the membership of the S D F by ten years of Hyndman's leadership and of isolation from the mass movement, was actually holding back the cause. Throughout Engels's letters to Sorge during these years (Lenin later commented)—

"... there runs like a thread the accusation that they [the S D F] transformed Marxism into a dogma, into a 'rigid orthodoxy', that they regard it as a 'symbol of faith' and not as a *guide to action*, that they are not able to envisage the theoretically helpless, but vital, mass, powerful, labour movement that is marching side by side with them"¹

In December, 1889, Engels had written

"Here in England one can see that it is impossible simply to drill a theory in an abstract dogmatic way into a great nation, even if one has the best of theories, developed out of their own conditions of life. The movement has now got going at last. But it is not directly Socialist, and those English who have understood our theory best remain outside it. Hyndman because he is incurably jealous and intriguing, Bax because he is only a bookworm"²

The Federation, he wrote next year, "still behave as if everyone except themselves were asses and bunglers". In April, 1891, he was writing of Hyndman

"He proves how useless a platform is—theoretically correct to a large extent—if it does not show understanding of how to fasten on to the real needs of the people"

In the most important parts of the movement, the New Unionism, and the Eight Hours' agitation, many S D F members were active, "but it is precisely those who are being drawn away from the particular influence of Hyndman, and treat the S D F. as a purely secondary matter". "People who pass as orthodox Marxists", Engels wrote in June, 1891, "have turned our ideas of movement into a fixed dogma to be learnt by heart [and] appear as pure sects"³

¹ "Preface to the Correspondence of Marx and Engels with Sorge, and others." See *Lenin on Britain* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1941), p. 75

² Engels to Sorge, December 7th, 1890, *Marx-Engels Sel. Cor.*, p. 460

³ *Ibid.*, April 8th and June 10th, 1891, *Labour Monthly*, April, 1934

Morris echoed his words. "I sometimes have a vision of a real Socialist Party at once united and free", he wrote to Glasier in March, 1892

"Is it possible? Here in London it might be done, I think, but the S D F stands in the way. Although the individual members are good fellows enough as far as I have met them, the society has got a sort of pedantic tone of arrogance and lack of generosity, which is disgusting and does disgust both Socialists and Non-Soc"¹

A great Socialist working-class party, "at once united and free". It was his old dream at the founding of the League (see p 484) now it was to become a central preoccupation for the rest of his life. If he was an "untalented politician" (and knew it) if he could scarcely persuade the twenty-odd most active members of the Hammersmith Socialist Society to follow his lead, nevertheless, he was gradually becoming aware that he exercised enormous influence within the young Socialist movement. Ever since the days of "Bloody Sunday" his reputation had continued to grow, despite his dwindling following in the League. His propaganda (as often as not) had been the first to be heard in this great town and that city, every group of Socialists included some who had been converted by his words, his poems, or his *Signs of Change*, his *News from Nowhere* (published in a cheap edition in 1891) was selling more widely than any other of his Socialist writings, and was making his name widely known among the workers of America and on the Continent.

If with every year that passed Morris's stature grew greater in the eyes of the working-class movement, startling confirmation of his great reputation among his own class came when, on Tennyson's death, he was "sounded" by a member of the Cabinet (with Gladstone's approval) to become the next Poet Laureate.² "What a set of ninnies the papers are about the Laureateship", Morris wrote to Glasier on October 11th, 1892, when speculation was rife. "Treating it with such absurd solemnity! Bet you it is offered to Swinburne. Bet you he takes it."³ But Swinburne was passed over, and the rumour had got about (inspired, perhaps, by the Burne-Joneses, who were acquaintances of Gladstone) that "Topsy", the "Author of *The Earthly Paradise*", had come back to live at Hammersmith, and that agitator, "Mr. W. Morris",

¹ Glasier, *op cit*, p 207

² Mackail, II, p 287

³ *Letters*, p 352

had left. It is amusing to imagine the horror which must have come to Morris's face when the suggestion was officially made. He countered by suggesting a court poetaster, the Marquis of Lorne, for the job—a suggestion which J. W. Mackail mistook for a serious proposal! Some hint of the matter reached the Press, and Blatchford sent a *Clarion* reporter down to Kelmscott House. First, Morris was questioned about his work with the Firm.

" 'It is a shoddy age,' he cried 'Shoddy is King. From the statesman to the shoemaker all is shoddy!'

" 'I concealed my boots under the table.

" 'Then you do not admire the commonsense John Bull, Mr Morris?'

" 'John Bull is a STUPID, UNPRACTICAL OAF' "

The reporter ("Quinbus Flestrin") changed the subject.

" 'What do you think of Manchester, Mr Morris?'

"The Poet started as if he had been stung, drew his pipe from his mouth, blew a gargantuan cloud, and after a pause, as if he were seeking a fitting expression, exclaimed, 'Manchester is a big ——' "

The subject was changed again.

" 'I see it was said in the *Daily Chronicle* that you had been offered the Laureateship.'

" 'The very idea!' he replied 'As if I could possibly accept it! A PRETTY PICTURE I should cut a Socialist Court Poet!' And his laugh was good—exceedingly good to hear."¹

Among his friends, Morris pictured himself with joy, "sitting down in crimson plush breeches and white silk stockings to write birthday odes in honour of all the blooming little Guelphings and Battenbergs that happen to come along!"²

It was in such ways as this that the new generation of the Labour Movement of the Nineties made their acquaintance with Morris, fashioning a picture made up of humour, affection and deep respect. For ten years the capitalist Press had cast doubts upon his moral honesty or mental sanity. If the question, "How can you be a 'capitalist' and a Socialist at the same time?" had been asked once, it had been asked a thousand times. "This modern Moses of Socialism", wrote the *Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review* in July, 1892, "prefers the ease and luxury of

¹ *Clarion*, November 19th, 1892.

² H. H. Sparling, *op cit*, p. 7.

commercial Egypt to the arduous and risky labour of leading the hosts to their promised land." But the mud had refused to stick. The rank and file of the Socialist movement might disagree with Morris's tactics and misunderstand his theory, they might be amused at his manners, and mistrust the luxuries of the Firm, but one fact was known throughout the movement. Morris was incorruptible.

Morris's long and steadfast refusal to become engaged in the bitter polemics which were such a common feature of the early movement, or to allow the columns of *Commonweal* to be used for personal attacks upon any section of the Socialist movement, was now beginning to bear fruit. In these last years, from 1892 to 1896, Morris stood *above* the movement—not in the sense of standing apart from it, but in the sense of comprising in his own person a point of unity above the divisions. He could write for the *Labour Prophet* (the organ of the Labour Church) although it was known that he had no interest in religion, or for *Liberty* without being accused of returning to Anarchism, or for *Justice* without bringing down on himself an attack from the *Labour Leader*; or he could lecture to the Fabians without being accused by Hyndman of treachery to the cause. This was in part, it is true, because he was no longer so closely engaged in the day-to-day struggle of the movement. But this very disengagement meant that he could work for the unity he so much desired with better effect.

IV *An Approach to Unity*

In December, 1892, the Hammersmith Socialist Society held a discussion on the subject "Is it now desirable to form a Socialist Federation?" The question was answered in the affirmative, and approaches were made at once to the two effective Socialist organizations in London—the S.D.F. and the Fabian Society. On December 18th, the Society appointed a special sub-committee, including Morris, "to promote the alliance of Socialist organizations in Great Britain." From the outset, Morris advocated an alliance of autonomous bodies, rather than proposing the merging of bodies so recently in opposition to each other. By mid-January, 1893, a joint committee of the Hammersmith Society and S.D.F. was meeting, which resolved

"It is advisable that an alliance should be established of all avowed Socialist organizations in the British Isles with the object of taking united action whenever possible without infringing on the autonomy of any organization represented"¹

At the same time the Fabian Society agreed to join the "Alliance" on these very general terms. Unexpected opposition came from Morris's own Society, which passed a resolution on February 10th, advocating the calling of a Conference of all Socialist societies by the narrow margin of fifteen to eight

In a sense, the move towards unity was made from the wrong end. Instead of seeking to build up unity in *action* upon common issues of importance, Morris was seeking the acknowledgement of a general agreement upon points of Socialist theory—where disagreement was most bitter. It was largely a tribute to Morris' own position that the Committee succeeded in meeting and achieving anything. Five delegates were appointed from each of the three societies. Morris was elected Chairman, Sydney Olivier Treasurer, and Hyndman, Morris and Shaw were appointed to draw up a joint Manifesto. Later Hyndman, characteristically, claimed the Manifesto as his own production, Shaw, more circumstantially, attributed the original drafting to Morris

"In drafting the manifesto Morris had taken care to give some expression to both the Fabian policy and the Social Democratic Federation policy. Hyndman immediately proposed the omission of the Fabian programme of municipal Socialism, and its explicit denunciation. I was equally determined not to endorse the policy of the S D F. Morris soon saw that we were irreconcilable. There was nothing for it but to omit both policies and substitute platitudes that any Church Congress could have signed"²

"The result was, I believe, a complete agreement between the three of us, though we did not formally express it, that the Manifesto was beneath contempt"³ "It was the only document any of the three of us had ever signed that was honestly not worth a farthing"⁴

So much for Shaw's opinion. Unfortunately, it is Shaw's

¹ Hammersmith Minutes, January 13th, 1893

² May Morris, II, pp xxxv-xxxvi

³ G B Shaw to Emery Walker, July, 1912, Brit Mus Add MSS 45347

⁴ May Morris, II, p xxxvi

opinion, despite all the shrewd witticisms, which is not worth a farthing, since—the week after Morris died—he convicted himself out of his own mouth of bad faith in the whole proceedings “I did not believe in the proposed union”, he wrote, “and, in fact, did not intend that it should be carried out if I could help it”¹ The *Manifesto of English Socialists*, which was issued on May 1st, 1893, bears the mark of both Morris and Hyndman, but very little of Shaw. So far from containing “platitudes that any Church Congress could have signed”, it succeeded in presenting a platform around which all the best elements in the British Socialist movement could have been rallied, and, indeed, while hazing over certain disputed points, would (if accepted in good faith) have committed the Fabian Society to a statement of revolutionary principles a good deal more explicit than they desired. As far as the drafting of unity on paper went, Morris had won a resounding success, and had nailed down Shaw and his friends to definitive statements from which they soon sought to wriggle free. A comparison of the Fabian “Basis” and the *Manifesto* makes this clear enough.

“The Fabian Society consists of Socialists

“It therefore aims at the re-organization of Society by the emancipation of Land and Industrial Capital from individual and class ownership, and the vesting of them in the community for the general benefit

“The Society works for the extinction of private property in Land and for the transfer to the community of the administration of such industrial Capital as can conveniently be managed socially”

In every third word is an imprecise definition, a qualification or evasion “Re-organization” as opposed to revolutionary change, “emancipation”, not of the working class, but of “Land and Industrial Capital”—to be “vested in” the community, not to be owned and controlled by the producers, the community to “administer” “such industrial Capital” (not means of production) “as can conveniently be managed” Here are the words of the *Manifesto*

“Municipalization can only be accepted as Socialism on the condition of its forming a part of national and at last international Socialism, in which the *workers* of all nations can federate upon a

¹ *Clarion*, October 10th, 1896

common basis of the *collective ownership* of the great means and instruments of the creation and distribution of wealth

"On this point all Socialists agree. Our aim, one and all, is to obtain for the whole community *complete ownership and control of the means of transport, the means of manufacture, the mines, and the land*. Thus we look to put an end for ever to the wage-system, to sweep away all distinctions of class, and eventually to establish national and international communism

"To this end it is imperative on all members of the Socialist party to gather together their forces in order to formulate a definite policy and force on its general acceptance "

From its opening paragraphs, in Morris's manner, in which it urged the need for co-operation among all genuine Socialists, to its final pages in which it set forward definite steps for immediate campaigning,¹ and urged the necessity of Socialists constituting themselves "into a distinct political party with definite aims, marching steadily along our own highway", the *Manifesto* was both more constructive and more specific than Shaw, and the historian of the Fabian Society (Edward R. Pease) suggest.² It is clear enough why "it was deemed advisable" by Shaw and Olivier to withdraw from the Committee in July.³

"Whatever other people do, we the Hammersmith people must be careful to make as little quarrel with either party as we can help", Morris wrote to Emery Walker on August 9th, 1893, after the Fabian secession. "More and more at any rate I want to see a due Socialist party established."⁴ But, if Shaw had been playing false, Hyndman was obstructing unity in a far more important direction. For, in January, 1893, the Independent Labour Party had held its first Conference in Bradford, and emerged confidently on the British scene. "You will find", Tom Maguire wrote to Edward Carpenter in November, 1892,

"that this new party lifts its head all over the North. It has caught the people as I imagine the Chartist movement did. And it is of the people—such will be the secret of its success. Everywhere its bent is

¹ The main immediate measures advocated were: An Eight-hour Law, Prohibition of all Child Labour, Equal Pay for Equal Work, A Minimum Wage in State Services, Abolition of Sweating, Universal Male and Female Suffrage, Payment for all Public Service.

² See E. R. Pease, *History of the Fabian Society*, p. 202.

³ *Eleventh Annual Report of the Fabian Society*, p. 11.

⁴ May Morris, II, p. 353.

Socialist because Socialists are the only people who have a message for it . "1

Maguire had a right to rejoice. His active mind and resolute leadership had done more than any other individual in the West Riding to pilot the newly-emerged mass movement into this form. Since most historians of the Socialist movement pass by the Socialist League with contempt, as an organization without serious influence on the Labour Movement, it is worth noting that the only Socialist propaganda in West Yorkshire in the 'eighties had come from this source. Maguire and his comrades played a part in the struggles leading to the formation of the I.L.P. for which recognition is long overdue, and their Socialism was learnt in part in William Morris's school.

Several other old Leaguers were prominent at the first Conference of the I.L.P., among them J. L. Mahon and A. K. Donald (supported, back-stage, by H. H. Champion). Mahon, true to his new faith in "spontaneity", opposed the adoption of the central, Socialist plank in the I.L.P. programme (the nationalization of the means of production and exchange), and attempted to substitute the "separate representation and protection of Labour interests on public bodies".² Thereafter, with a row in Leeds and an election fight in Aberdeen, Mahon went into the wilderness, while Donald resumed his interrupted career in the law, ending up as a Judge in India.³ Other old Leaguers present included Jowett and Pickles of Bradford, Alf Mattison of Leeds, while in 1894 Leonard Hall of Manchester went on to the Executive. But, as Maguire understood, the most important elements were not the old pioneers, but the new trade unionists: "it is of the people—such will be the secret of its success".

What was Morris's attitude to the I.L.P.? Why did the Joint

¹ *Tom Maguire: a Remembrance*, p. xii

² *Report of the First General Congress of the I.L.P.*, *passim*

³ In the autumn of 1892 Mahon stood as Parliamentary Candidate in South Leeds on the initiative and with the financial backing of Champion. He was disqualified from going to the poll on a technicality. After fighting the Aberdeen bye-election, he resumed his trade as an engineer, and thereafter dropped entirely out of the movement. In the 1920s he took up occasional journalism in trade union and Socialist papers. He died in 1930. A. K. Donald also withdrew from political activity by about 1895, was "called" as a barrister about 1896, went to India about 1900, where he became a deputy-judge. Returned to London in 1915 or 1916, and died soon afterwards.

Committee not include their representatives' "I really think we must have taken it for granted that the I.L.P. did not rank as a Socialist body", Shaw wrote, when trying to answer this question¹ Once again, Shaw's recollection played him false. Hyndman declared in his reminiscences that it was Morris's hope that the I.L.P. would be drawn in. It can hardly be a coincidence that in February and March, 1893, the Hammersmith Socialist Society invited Keir Hardie and Shaw Maxwell (twice) to speak on their aims.² The real cause lay in the unmeasured hostility of Hyndman and his following to the new party. "There is occasionally a cry for a united Independent Labour Party", *Justice* declared while the Conference was sitting.

"A really independent labour party must be a Social-Democratic party. Outside Social-Democracy there is no basis for a labour party."³

Engels, who declared his support for the tendency of the new party (and who approved Aveling's action in taking a seat on its Executive), came in for a special round of abuse.

"Why is it that he carefully secludes himself, Grand Lama-like, in the Thibetan fastnesses of Regent's Park Road, as if he were qualifying for the post of a Socialist Mahatma?"⁴

J. E. Dobson, of the S.D.F., who was a secretary of the Joint Committee, later crossed over to the I.L.P., where he declared the truth of the matter.

"When the Hammersmith Socialist Society, under William Morris, called for a united conference, the I.L.P. was left out, because in the eyes of the S.D.F., the I.L.P. was not a Socialist party, although the Fabians were included. He personally [Dobson] had met with nothing but censure when he proposed that the I.L.P. should be admitted."⁵

¹ G. B. Shaw to May Morris, April 24th, 1913, Brit. Mus. Add. MSS 45347.

² Hammersmith Minutes, February, 1893, J. Keir Hardie, "The Labour Movement", Shaw Maxwell, "Programme of the Labour Party", March, 1893, Shaw Maxwell, "Aims and Objects of the Labour Party".

³ *Justice*, January 14th, 1893.

⁴ *Ibid.*, April 1st, 1893. Hyndman's editorial in the same issue complained: "At his little Paris Commune meeting in the supper-room of the Communistic Arbeiter-Bildungs Verein the other night, Frederick Engels proclaimed that this same Party [the I.L.P.] with his special favourite [Aveling] at the head, would sweep on to victory for the petty Marxist clique."

⁵ *Report of the Sixth Annual Conference of the I.L.P.* (1898), p. 34.

So ended Morris's most earnest attempt to promote a united party—with the Fabians frightened off by their own *Manifesto*, and Hyndman resolutely closing his eyes to the very existence of the I.L.P. Well might Engels write of "the petty private ambitions and intrigues of the London would-be-greats", and see the hope in the I.L.P. for the very reason that "the centre of gravity lies in the provinces and not in London, the home of cliques".¹ But Morris's home was not in the North—it was in London, where the I.L.P. was not for several years to get a firm hold. Moreover, it was the gap between the dogmatic revolutionary theory of the S.D.F. and the mass character and undogmatic instincts of the rank and file of the I.L.P. which he especially wished to bridge. In the autumn of 1893, during the great coal lock-out, he succeeded once again in getting a joint statement drawn up, addressed to the miners, but—after consulting Blatchford, who said that the miners would neither read it nor understand it—it remained unpublished.² Meanwhile, he—like Blatchford in the *Clarion*—kept up the propaganda for unity. In his important article in the *Labour Prophet* for January, 1894, he wrote

"The tendency of the English to neglect organization till it is forced upon them by immediate necessity, their ineradicable personal conceit, which holds them aloof from one another, is obvious in the movement. The materials for a great Socialist party are all around us, but no such party exists. We have only the scattered limbs of it, we are divided into various organizations, which stand in the way of *organization*, since they are all afflicted with some degree of narrowness.

"All this wants rectification. Our business at present seems to me to preach Socialism to non-Socialists and to preach unity of action to Socialists."

Affiliation, he suggested, with the preservation of a measure of autonomy, was the solution. Already in the localities, this unity was being forged in action. He looked forward to a great Socialist party, independent of both political parties, and (with a special dig at the "Tory gold" scare which Champion's intrigues had once again raised in the movement), free from every shadow of intrigue with them.

During 1894 the disastrous split in the labour movement was

¹ Engels to Sorge, January 18th, 1893, *Marx-Engels Sel. Cor.*, p. 505.

² Laurence Thompson, *Robert Blatchford: Portrait of an Englishman* (1951), p. 97.

further widened. The I L P made approaches to the S D F which were rebuffed at the Annual Conference of that body, which resolved that "there can be no need for the separate existence of the I L P." The proper place for any conscious Socialists in the I L P was inside the S D F, under Hyndman's leadership, and the sooner they learnt it the better. Blatchford continued his campaign in *Clarion*, and in October, 1894, Morris addressed him on behalf of the Hammersmith Socialist Society.

"As to the necessity of the formation of a definite and united Socialist party my comrades of this society are of opinion that this might and should be done without any interference with the existing organizations. However much the opinion of the workers may be turning in the direction of Socialism, as it certainly is, no step forward towards the realization of the new society, by means of getting hold of the executive of the country, can be taken till the Socialists are united in a recognizable party, with tactics as clear as their aims, and that the test of membership in such a party should be an explicitly declared agreement, with the aim of nationalization of the means of production and exchange, and the abolition of all privilege."

The letter concluded with an expression of support for "the energetic and straightforward struggle" of Blatchford and Co., and the words "I am, dear Comrade, yours fraternally, William Morris." Thereafter, the feeling among the rank and file of both organizations, I L P and S D F, grew ever more strong for some form of merger or close association. For several years an elaborate exchange of resolutions, fraternal greetings and insults passed between the Executives of the two bodies, more than once, the two seemed on the verge of fusion, but Hyndman's jealousy, and the reformist leaders of the I L P—first one, then the other—frustrated the plain desires of their own members. In 1895 a new approach from the I L P received warm support from the Hammersmith Socialist Society, but a rebuff from the Executive of the S D F.¹ One final stage only in the

¹ H S S to I L P, September 20th, 1895. "This Society is unanimously of opinion that to work for the formation of such a party is the duty of all Socialists, and any movement having for its object the federation of all existing Socialist bodies will have the support of the Society" (*Report of the Fourth Annual Conference of the I L P*, p. 16). *Justice* pronounced on April 18th, 1896: "It would surely be most foolish and imprudent for the thoroughgoing Social-Democratic Party of Great Britain to hamper itself in any way by half-hearted alliances merely for the sake of nominal unity."

negotiations is relevant to Morris and his life. In 1897 (after his death) a committee to arrange the amalgamation of the two bodies reached agreement upon every point but the name of the new party, a ballot of the members of both organizations revealed them to be wholeheartedly in favour of the step. This time it was the Executive of the I L P, at their Annual Conference in 1898, which sabotaged the prospects of unity. As part of their campaign to stampede the delegates in Conference, the Executive put up one of their own members to read a long and patently hypocritical "paper" on the proposed fusion. Here are a few examples of the manner and the sentiment

"Socialism is a very great and a very marvellously pervading and encompassing power. It is the most human spirit that has grown up in the world, and it is the divinest of all things we have ever had vision of with our eyes. We who call ourselves Socialists cannot ourselves comprehend its might or magnitude. We are as reeds shaken in the wind of its coming. We can only receive knowledge of it so far as the space and peculiarities of our minds will allow, and of the knowledge which we receive we can only give out according to the little measure of powers. Is it not, therefore, somewhat perilous that we should do anything that might tend to narrow or lessen the inlet of Socialist ideas upon ourselves, or confine and constrain the message of Socialism, which is to be given forth to the whole nation, into one single channel? Is it not, think you, better for a land that there be many pleasant rivers and brooks—yea, and mountain torrents—of Socialism than that there be one straight, flat, unfertilizing central canal?"¹

It is sad to name the author of this passage, J. Bruce Glasier, rising star and "idealist philosopher" of the I L P., bitter opponent of Marxism, bosom-friend of J. Ramsay MacDonald, and—the most strenuous claimant to be the inheritor of the mantle of William Morris!

It is sad, also, that William Morris did not find even one notable follower among the old Leaguers who could carry forward his example and his ideas!

V Mature Theory

Not one notable follower? In a sense this is true. Tom Maguire, the best of the old League, was beset by difficulties and disappointments. Careerists were jumping on the band-wagon of the new

¹ *Report of the Sixth Annual Conference of the I L P*, pp. 25-8

party, which was already an electoral force in West Yorkshire. Bitter dissensions broke out. The first parliamentary election fight was at Halifax, where the I L P Treasurer, John Lister—a aristocrat, mine-owner, courageous and gentle-hearted Fabian—was put up. In *electoral* terms, Lister, with his strong local influence, was an obvious choice, but as the first candidate of the independent *labour* party, many thought his selection a disaster. Mahon, for registering a public protest, was expelled from the Leeds I L P. The recriminations, back-biting and petty jealousies put a veneer of cynicism upon Maguire's deep earnestness, worse, in intervals between unemployment and bursts of his old miraculous agitation, he began to drink.¹

But Maguire was not the man to allow his disgust with false comrades in the movement to extend to the class for which he fought. In the winter of 1893 he was running in Leeds the *Labour Champion*, a paper of militant trade unionism and Socialism. Thereafter he was constantly engaged in the unemployed agitation, in particular in the bitter winter months of 1894-5, "concealing from everybody the fact that he was practically one of the unemployed himself, and more acutely in need than many of those he was pleading for."² He was profoundly moved by the suffering around him, and wrote his "Out o' Work's Prayer"

"O God of Humanity, gaze on me, powerless, pulseless, and spent,
Shrunk of muscle and withered of heart and of mind,
With all that was hope in me strangled, distorted, broken, and bent—
All that was man in me loosened and left far behind .

¹ Among the Mahon papers is a letter from W. Vickers, Secretary of the Leeds I L P, dated June 12th, 1893, which includes this passage: "Tom Maguire is the only man of perception and of real intelligence we have, his abilities are without doubt far above those of all the rest of us put together and this is acknowledged by every one, but still . . . I can see a great deal of jealousy . . . in a lot of weak-kneed, ignorant, boneless, brainless jabbering idiots, and this latent jealousy will burst out against him if he only shook off his apathy and stepped forward and took that position in the Party which he is entitled to take, that is, the position of Leader. Tom is popular, no man more so, but it is only because he sinks his own individuality and allows other people to run away with his ideas. He is, in addition to having a slight natural bias to indolence, about disgusted—too much so to take up the work with anything like the enthusiasm and determination which such a work would demand."

² *Tom Maguire a Remembrance*, p. xiii

"And the low inarticulate cry of the legions who labour, O Hear'
 As they fall broken under by hunger, and toil, and unrest,
 See them poisoned, and drooping, and dying, yet bleached with
 unspeakable fear,
 Of the famine-wolf crouching to spring at the masters' behest
 "Haik the chant of the heroes afar, who lived and who strove for
 mankind,
 Marching bravely to death o'er the stretch of Siberian plains,
 Hear the shriek of wild birds swooping down on the faint who have
 fallen behind—
 Lo! the line of stark skeleton forms left to crumble in chains
 "So hearing, then curse Thou thy chosen, thy fair favoured daughters
 and sons,
 Whose greed has no limits, whose lust has no mercy nor shame,
 Who fawn to Thee steeped to the lips in the life-blood of innocent
 ones,
 O hearken! And curse them by famine, by flood, and by flame
 "Barrabas is god in thy Temple, thy Son has no place in the land,
 Thy word by Iscariot preachers is gilded to sell,
 Then rise is thy wrath, mighty God!—if thou livest—and stretch forth
 thy hand,
 Wring their curst souls from their bodies and fling them to hell"¹

His thoughts were turning on writing a clear textbook of Socialist theory, in language which the workers could directly understand "People call themselves Socialists", he wrote, "but what they really are is just ordinary men with Socialist opinions hung round, they haven't got it inside of them" The intrigues of the I L P depressed him "I want to get it away from your damned party politics and silly quarrels . . . We get mixed up in disputes among ourselves . . . and can't keep a straight line for the great thing"² On February 10th, 1895, he was lecturing on the theme of "Labour Federation". Three weeks later Alf Mattison heard that he was ill, and, hurrying to his home, where he lived with his mother, found him suffering from pneumonia, without food or fire in the house The aid of the comrades came too late, and two days later, on March 8th, Tom Maguire died As he lay dying a friend suggested a priest and reconciliation with the faith of his youth. "No", answered Tom, "I will stand or fall on the last twelve years of my life and not on

¹ *Tom Maguire a Remembrance*, pp 35-6

² *Ibid*, p vi

the last five minutes." The people lined the streets for two miles when his funeral procession, 1,000 strong, went by. No other man in Yorkshire had given such long and such notable service to the cause, and yet this man, at his death, was only twenty-nine!¹

With Maguire dead, were no others of those who were schooled in the League to carry forward Morris's internationalism, ardour, and incorruptibility, and become notable leaders in the movement? No names come to mind, although F. W. Jowett, Fred Henderson and Leonard Hall all played important parts. The most prominent of the leaders at the turn of the century came from different schools. And yet Morris's propaganda was sown broadcast wherever the movement thrived. It was finding its expression, not in a few leaders, but in the spirit of the rank and file.

It was this question—the question of *leadership*, of the absorption into the mass movement of a clear, revolutionary theory—which was the constant theme of Morris's last years. Unity in itself was not enough. The united party must be a *Socialist* party. The workers "need education, they want to be shown what to demand, and how to do so. This is the task of us Socialists . . ." Morris wrote in May, 1893.² He distrusted the "intensely electioneering" tactics of the new I.L.P., and had reservations about Keir Hardie, Robert Blatchford and its general leadership. Engels who shared this distrust, placed his confidence in the power of the mass movement to silence the petty ambitions of the leaders. "Socialism has penetrated the masses in the industrial districts enormously in the past years and I am counting on these masses to keep the leaders in order."³ Morris did not share this confidence. While he now recognized the educative role of the struggle, he feared that the revolutionary theory might be submerged, rather than absorbed in the mass movement. The propaganda of theory, he repeatedly insisted, must not be neglected, but should rather be redoubled; although he now saw that it must come from *within* the movement, or in friendly alliance with it, rather than from a purist sect outside.

His article in the *Labour Prophet* for January, 1894, put the

¹ Notebooks and papers of Alf Mattison.

² Morris to J. Edwards, May 5th, 1893 (*Labour Prophet*, July, 1893).

³ *Marx-Engels Sel. Cor.*, p. 507.

matter most clearly. It was *still* the business of Socialists to make Socialists, he began.

"Socialism has begun to take hold of the working classes, and is now a genuine working man's movement. That is a fact, the importance of which it is impossible to overrate. But, on the other hand, the movement is taking a different form from what many, or most, of us supposed it would, a thing which was, in fact, inevitable, and which is so far encouraging that it is one of the signs of the genuineness and steadfastness of the movement. I mean, there is nothing in it of conscious and pedantic imitation of former changes—the French Revolution for instance. Abstract theories are not much in favour, less than they should be, perhaps,¹ though time will surely mend that. As yet there is no formulated demand for a great, sudden, and obvious recasting of society, . . . but there is a steady set towards a road which will infallibly lead us to a society recast in a Socialistic mould.

"The instinct towards Socialism is awake, and is forcing the working classes into what we now see to be the right, because it is the only course. And though as yet it may not be more than an instinct with the great mass of the workers, yet we must remember that it is headed by a great number of men (I am not speaking of those technically called 'leaders') who are declared Socialists, and who understand at least what may be called work-a-day Socialism. All this makes our advance much greater than we had any right to expect to come out of the then condition of things ten years ago . . . The first act of the great Class War has begun, for the workmen are claiming their recognition as citizens . . .

"But great as the gain is, our responsibilities as Socialists have increased in proportion to it. In the earlier stage of the movement they were simple indeed. Socialism was a theory in this country, an ideal held by a little knot of enthusiasts and students, who could give little reason for their hope of seeing it realized, save the irresistible force with which its truths had taken hold of their minds and hearts. The working classes were not in the least touched by it. . .

"I say our duties were simple . . . To preach Socialism, in season and out of season, where we were wanted, where we were tolerated, where we were *not* tolerated, that was all we had to do. No other action was possible to us than trying to convince people, by talking, that Socialism was right and possible.

"This has still to be done, and will always be necessary till Socialism

¹ Morris was well aware of the chauvinism and hostility to theory found in parts of the trade union movement. E.g. the speech of Ben Tillet at the First General Congress of the I.L.P. "If there were fifty such red revolutionary parties as there were in Germany, he would sooner have the solid, progressive, matter-of-fact, fighting Trades' Unionism of England than all the hare-brained chattering and magpies of Continental revolutionists . . ." (*Report* . . . , p. 3)

is realized . . . But now . . . other action . . . is forced upon us by the growing . . . practical acceptance of the theory of Socialism. The workers have started to claim new conditions of life which they can only obtain at the expense of the possessing classes, and they must therefore *force* their claims on the latter.

"To speak plainly, there are only two methods of bringing the necessary force to bear: open armed insurrection on the one hand, the use of the vote, to get hold of the executive, on the other. Of the first method they are not even thinking but the second they are growing more determined to use day by day, and it is practically the only direct means. And it must be said that, if they are defeated in their attempt, it means the present defeat of Socialism though its ultimate defeat is impossible."

Thus Socialists were set (Morris wrote) a twofold job. First, they must provide the theory of the struggle. if they failed in this, they were abandoning their duty of *directing* the spontaneous movement of the workers. Second, they must participate alongside the workers in all forms of the labour struggle, parliamentary and municipal elections:

"It is certainly our business, then, to make that struggle as strenuous as possible, while we at the same time hold up before the workers the ideal that lies ahead of the present days of conflict."

It was precisely this period of transition to this "troublesome and wearisome action" which he felt to be a difficult one. "The number of declared and instructed Socialists is small in proportion to the general movement", and herein he noted both a source of danger, and an especial reason for Socialist unity.

This article contains the clearest *practical* embodiment of Morris's changed views, which found many expressions in his lectures and writings between 1892 and 1894 notably in two lectures on "Communism", his lecture, "What Is: What Should Be. What Will Be", and his letters to the *Sun* and the *Daily Chronicle* ("The Deeper Meaning of the Struggle"—reprinted as a leaflet by the Hammersmith Socialist Society) on the great coal lock-out of the autumn of 1893. In the first of these letters, in which he appealed for support for the miners, he declared for the policy of a minimum wage and a maximum price, as a step towards the first stage of Socialism.¹ In the second, he related the struggle of "these staunch miners" to the struggle

¹ The letter is published in full in *May Morris*, II, pp. 519-21.

for the re-birth of art (see p. 771). In the lectures he dealt, amongst other matters, with the old "parliamentary" question. Morris had never, even in his most intransigent "anti-parliamentary" period, denied that *at some stage* Socialists might enter parliament to seize control of the executive power: now, with important qualifications, he accepted the necessity of following the parliamentary road. The lectures, written for close discussion among the Socialists, and not for general publication, are more hesitant in tone than the letters and the article in the *Labour Prophet*. The workers, he declared in "What Is. What Should Be What Will Be"—

"are beginning to be discontented. What they see is that they might be better off; that they might get higher wages and less precarious work, more leisure, more share in public advantages, and as a means to all these things some direct share in the national talk-shop. All this they will try for, and will get the formula thereto made into law within a certain time. Now I firmly believe that it is an illusion to think that they can have the reality of any of these things without their gaining the beginnings of Socialism. . . . but I also believe that things have now gone so far, that the lesser claim above mentioned . . . will lead to the greater, though it will be through many blunders and disappointments: and the road will be long."

The parliamentary road was not the road of his choice; but the workers had chosen it, and—

"I do not fail to appreciate the necessity for immediate action, and I now see that this parliamentary action must be and will be. so let us do our best in it, not merely [as] working men members but [as] Socialists."

The lecture was now jotted rapidly in note form, and only the outline survives.

"Ought to have working men in order to break down the habit of class members, but get good men and good for the purpose where you can. And let them be under good party discipline. This party must be and will be, but I fear will be somewhat long in coming. but when it is formed, then the advance to Socialism will be speedy."¹

In his well-known lecture on "Communism", delivered to the Fabian Society in 1893, his new understanding of the dual

¹ Brit. Mus. Add MSS 48334.

role of practical and theoretical struggle found its maturest expression. It is a lecture which should be obligatory reading for every English Socialist to-day, envisaging as it does with great concreteness the corruption (albeit temporary) of the Socialist ideal in a capitalist "welfare state". The lecture should be read as a whole, in the light of the situation and of his changing views, here there is space only to summarize the leading lines of the argument

"I am driven to the conclusion that those [i.e. immediate] measures . . . are of use toward the education of the great mass of the workers, that it is necessary in the present to give form to vague aspiration. . . Taking up such measures, directly tending towards Socialism, is necessary also in getting working people to raise their standard of livelihood . . . Lastly, such measures, with all that goes towards getting them carried, will train them into organization and administration. . . But this education by political and corporate action must . . . be supplemented by instilling into the minds of the people a knowledge of the aims of socialism, and a longing to bring about the complete change which will supplant civilization by communism . . . The measures . . . are either make-shift alleviations . . . or means for landing us in the new country of equality And there is a danger that they will be looked upon as ends in themselves "

If Morris now saw the importance of the practical struggle, he knew that his own abilities cast him for a role on the theoretical wing of the movement. In 1892 he had been revising with Bax the series of articles which they had written for *Commonweal*, "Socialism From the Root Up" Now, in 1893, they were published in book form as *Socialism Its Growth and Outcome* The book has its failings. too much is given over to the historical background, and too few of the illustrations used were drawn directly from the workers' experience, for it to serve as a textbook for general use within the movement. But as a clear expression of Morris's final Socialist position it is invaluable The central place given to Marx and Engels refutes the anti-Marxist interpreters of Morris who got to work within a few years of its publication (see p. 736 f.). The original *Commonweal* chapter on "Socialism Militant" was totally rewritten A new prominence was given to the industrial struggle By contrast with the position in 1883 (Bax and Morris wrote) .

"There is in it less of the mere dispute between two parties to a

contract admitted as necessary by either, and more of an instinct of essentially opposed interests between employers and employed"¹

They declared their approval for the immediate demands voiced by the most militant section of the movement the legal eight-hour day, the minimum wage and maximum price. Municipal reform received favourable mention. The mass movement set in motion by the New Unionism, they were careful to point out, was a movement "not of *Socialists*, but of men moved by the growing *instinct towards Socialism*". The traditional discrepancy, or even antipathy, "in all democratic fermentations . . . between the theoretic movement . . . and the actual popular or working-class struggle" might still be traced. But its end had been signalled in 1847, with the publication of the *Communist Manifesto*, and in the new movement

"The workmen are not unwilling to accept the theorists as leaders, while the theorists fully and frankly recognise that it is through the instinctive working-class movement towards the bettering of life, by whatever political-economic means, that their ideal of a new society must be sought"

In short, while it was essential that the theory should be "always kept before the eyes of the mass of the working-classes", lest the continuity of the struggle should be broken, or the movement should be misdirected, yet at the same time "it is no less essential that the theorists should steadily take part in all action that tends towards Socialism, lest their wholesome and truthful theories should be left adrift on the barren shore of Utopianism".² It is "a matter of course" that Socialism would not appear one day by some sudden catastrophe, "that some Monday morning the sun will rise on a communized state which was capitalistic on Saturday night". Armed revolt or civil war was not the main, or the major, means of achieving the revolution, although it "may be an *incident* of the struggle, and in some form or another probably will be, especially in the latter phases of the revolution". But these latter phases would only be reached through "the gradual shifting of the opinions and aspirations of the masses", through the industrial and political struggles already outlined. At the same time, Morris and Bax did not suggest a gradual Fabian "glide" into the

¹ Morris and Bax, *Socialism, Its Growth and Outcome* (1893), p. 271

² *Ibid.*, p. 278-9.

new society, but, rather, after long preliminaries of education and struggle, a sharp, qualitative break

"The first real victory of the Social Revolution will be the establishment not indeed of a complete system of Communism in a day, which is absurd, but of a revolutionary administration whose *definite and conscious aim* will be to prepare and further, in all available ways, human life for such a system— an administration whose every act will be of set purpose with a view to Socialism"¹

So close are the views outlined here and elsewhere during this period to those expressed in Engels's letters, that it is interesting to speculate whether Morris and Engels may have resumed their contacts of the earlier days

VI *Reconciliation with the S D F*

In *Justice* in January, 1894, Morris made his position even more clear. It is a sign of his generosity and absence of personal pride that he was ready to retract his old differences with Hyndman. "Present circumstances", he said,

"go to prove the wisdom of the S D F in drawing up palliative measures. Mean and paltry as it seemed to me,—and does still, as compared with the whole thing,—something of the kind is absolutely necessary."

The immediate need was to create "a strong party", "a party with delegates in the House of Commons, which would have complete control over those delegates". This insistence upon the subordination of the parliamentary party to the discipline of the party as a whole is of the greatest importance, and Morris deliberately stressed it as a point of demarcation between the revolutionary and the reformist use of Parliament. Such a group of *delegates* would win concession after concession until the point of crisis would be reached. But Morris made it clear that there was nothing inherently holy in the constitutional machinery itself, nothing "undemocratic" in employing extra-parliamentary means. It was a matter of tactics, deduced from the conditions of the movement in Britain.

"You cannot start with revolt—you must lead up to it, and exhaust other means first. I do not agree that you should abstain from any act

¹ *Socialism, Its Growth and Outcome*, p. 285

merely on the grounds that it would precipitate civil war, even though the result of the civil war were problematical, so long as the initial act was justifiable. But with the tremendous power of modern armies, it is essential that everything should be done to legalise revolt. As we have seen [at Featherstone, where the Yorkshire miners were fired on in 1893] the soldiers will fire upon the people without hesitation so long as there is no doubt as to the legality of their doing so. Men do not fight well with halters round their necks, and that is what a revolt now would mean. We must try and get at the butt end of the machine-gun and the rifle, and then force is much less likely to be necessary and much more sure to be successful."¹

The interview in *Justice* marked a definite turn by Morris towards the S.D.F. Blatchford, in the *Clarion*, was calling upon him to take his rightful position in the leadership of the I.L.P. He refused, for several reasons. He knew that neither his health nor his abilities suited him for active leadership. Such propaganda work as he could still do in London, was obviously done better for his own Society or the S.D.F. than for the I.L.P. He had turned his back upon the Fabians ever since their withdrawal from the Joint Committee. The blather by which they tried to represent the smallest piece of administrative machinery or the least "Lib.-Lab." victory, as a portent for the advance of something they called "Socialism," earned his brief contempt. "Was it true that Shaw" (he asked the *Justice* interviewer) "said the other day that there was a party of fifteen already in the House of Commons? If I had been there I should have asked him to name them."² As far as Morris was concerned there was a party of one—Keir Hardie; and about him he had doubts, although he told Glasier next year that he felt "his fight for the unemployed has had something great in it." ³ Blatchford he "rather liked the looks of". "You see", he wrote to Leatham of Aberdeen, who had now joined the S.D.F., "you must let a man work on the lines he really likes. No man ever does good work unless he likes it:

¹ *Justice*, January 27th, 1894.

² *Ibid*, January 27th, 1894. The 1892 election had returned Keir Hardie, John Burns, and J. Havelock Wilson, together with eleven Lib.-Labs. of the Burt variety. Perhaps the fifteenth in Shaw's mind was Michael Davitt, the Irish Land Leaguer, who was later unseated.

³ Glasier, p. 137. According to Glasier, Morris had said of Keir Hardie "I have had, I confess, rather my doubts about him because of his seeming absorption in mere electioneering schemes."

evasion is all you can get out of him by compulsion"¹ But, while he now accepted the need for a *revolutionary* parliamentary struggle, the absorption of the I L P in electioneering and its neglect of theory disturbed him. In his own Society a contest was being waged, on the issue of whether or not to enter candidates in the joint "Progressive" list for the Vestry and Board of Guardians elections. The "Progressives" won, and Bullock and Morris's daughter, May, were among the candidates. Morris duly voted; but the election (in December, 1894) left him "lethargic and faint-hearted". "I dare say you think me rather lukewarm about the affair", he wrote to "George" Burne-Jones—

"but I am so depressed with the pettiness and timidity of the bill and the checks and counterchecks with which such an obvious measure [the new Local Government Act] has been hedged about "

Eight candidates were successful for the Board of Guardians, but the Vestry candidates were defeated. "You see all through London the middle class voted solid against us, which I think extremely stupid of them, as they might well have got credit for supporting an improved administration"² The enthusiasm expended by some of his colleagues upon capturing a part of the liberal vote was "tommy-rot" which left him cold.³

Therefore it was with the S.D.F., the most declared revolutionary party, that he identified himself most closely in 1894 and 1895. He would not join the organization, so long as he felt that his influence might contribute towards bridging the split in the movement. Moreover, in the first full article which he wrote for *Justice* ("How I Became a Socialist", June 16th, 1894), he inserted (without doubt with careful forethought) a humorous reference to his own difficulties with *Capital*, and an insistence upon the importance of cultural questions to the Socialist movement. both very salutary rebuffs to the doctrinaire and mechanical outlook of some in the S.D.F. But, as the known party of revolution, he felt his place to be at its side: he contributed poems and occasional articles to *Justice* he spoke from the S.D.F. platform on the May Day of 1894. In February, 1894, he spoke for George

¹ May Morris, II, p 340

² Mackail, II, pp 308-9

³ Entry in his diary for February 15th, 1895, Brit Mus Add MSS 45410

Lansbury, S D F. candidate at Walworth, in a bye-election ¹ In March, 1894, he made a propaganda visit to Manchester under the auspices of the local branch of the S D.F., speaking both in the Free Trade Hall and at an open-air meeting near the Ship Canal (see p 731). He handsomely admitted that Hyndman had been right, in standing for a policy of specific political palliatives, and declared "We are now hand-in-glove" In 1895 he spoke again for George Lansbury and in the General Election of the same year, he was invited by the South Salford S D F. to become their parliamentary candidate² (another "PRETTY PICTURE!") He agreed to go to Burnley and speak in Hyndman's support There he publicly declared (according to Hyndman): "In 1884 Hyndman and I had a great quarrel, and I have to say this: that he was quite right and I was quite wrong"³ If indeed he said this, then generosity could have been taken no further ⁴

His last full lecture-notes which have survived are dated March 30th, 1895, and the lecture entitled "What We have to Look For". He started, as in other late lectures, by contrasting the early days of the movement, when the Socialists were no more than a sect, with the present labour movement, with its vague aspirations towards Socialism Then he looked into the future He could not, however he looked at the matter, see any final resolution of the class struggle "otherwise than by disturbance and suffering of some kind" (see p 588) "I believe that the very upward movement of labour . . . will have to be paid for like other good things, and that the price will be no light one." Then, once again, he struggled with the vision of reformism which had haunted all his Socialist propaganda His friend, John Carruthers, had written a pamphlet (issued in 1894 by the Hammersmith Society) in which he made a masterly exposure of the way in which limited measures of nationalization, and in particular the nationalization of the railways, might be welcomed by a majority of the capitalist class, nay, might indeed make the

¹ *Justice*, February 24th, 1894

² James Leatham, *William Morris Master of Many Crafts* (1908), p 124

³ Hyndman, *Record of an Adventurous Life*, pp 361-2

⁴ Morris headed the subscription list for Hyndman's fight at Burnley, and gave the largest individual subscription to Lansbury's fund, *Justice*, July 13th and 20th, 1895

machinery of exploitation more efficient, without endangering the existence of the capitalist system¹ Morris took due note of this, as he did also of the prevailing set of opinion in hostility to serious theory within the I.L.P. Here are the questions which he put to the new movement.

"I should above all things like to have a genuine answer to this question, setting aside all convention, all rhetoric and flummery, what is it that you want from the present labour movement? Higher wages, more regular employment? Shorter working hours—better education for your children—old age pensions, libraries, parks and the rest. Are these things and things like them what you want? They are of course, but what else do you want? If you cannot answer the question straightforwardly I must say you are wandering on a road the outcome of which you cannot tell.

"If you *can* answer it, and say Yes, that is all we want then I say here is the real advice to give you. Don't meddle with Socialism. make peace with your employers, before it is too late, and you will find that from them and their Committee, the House of Commons, you will get such measure of these things as will probably content you. If this is all you want, work with your employers. consider their interests as well as your own. . make sacrifices to-day that you may do well to-morrow, compete your best with foreign nations. and I think you will do well. I cannot indeed promise you that you will bring back the prosperity of the country. . but you may well stave off the breakdown, which in these last years does really seem to be drawing near, and at any rate you will make the best of what prosperity there is left us as *workmen* and according to their standard of life.

"If that is all you want, how can we who are not workmen blame you? I must own that sometimes when I am dispirited I think this is all that the labour movement means. it doesn't mean Socialism at all, it only means improvement in the condition of the working classes. they will get that in some terms or another—till the break up comes, and it may be a long way ahead. And yet. . . imperfect, erring, unorganized, chaotic as that movement is, there is a spirit of antagonism to our present foolish wasteful system in it, and a sense of the unity of labour as against the exploiters of labour which is the one necessary idea for those who are ever so little conscious of making toward Socialism."

By example, he pointed to the astonishing reception of "Comrade Blatchford's" *Merry England*

"The thousands who have read that book must if they have done so carefully have found out that something better is possible to be thought

¹ See J. Carruthers, *Socialism and Radicalism* (1894)

of than the life of a prosperous mill-hand Self-respect, happy and fit work, leisure, beautiful surroundings, in a word, the earth our own and the fullness thereof, and nobody really dares to assert that this good life can be attained to till we are essentially and practically Socialized."

Finally, some words on the need for a united party.

"My hope is . . . that we shall do so much propagandist work, and convert so many people to Socialism that they will insist on having a genuine Socialist party . . . and they will not allow the personal fads and vanities of leaders (so-called) to stand in the way of real business "

Until that party should be firmly formed, "we" (the Hammer-smith Socialist Society) "had better confine ourselves to the old teaching and preaching of Socialism pure and simple, which I fear is more or less neglected amidst the . . . futile attempt to act as a party when we have no party".¹ On the back of the final page were jotted some notes to jog his memory when he replied to the discussion.

"Tochatti—to use our recruits when we've got them

"Mordhurst—the unemployed

"Unknown—Henry George and co-operation

"Bullock—giving up the problem

"Unknown clergyman—rather more depressed than I."

On May Day, 1895, Morris was again on the S.D.F. platform.² In *Justice* he contributed an article, in which he took up the same theme as in "What We have to Look For"—the difference between the revolutionary and reformist roads. "To the Socialist", he stressed, "the aim is not the improvement of condition but *the change in position* of the working classes." Of the reformist road he said, "I think it will be taken, I fear not wholly unsuccessfully".

"The present necessities of working people are so great that they must take what they can get, and it so hard for them in their miserable condition to have any vivid conception of what a life of freedom and equality can give them that they can scarcely, the average of them, turn their hopes to a future which they may never see."

"And yet if that future is not to be indefinitely postponed they must repudiate this demi-semi-Socialism".

¹ Brit Mus. Add. MSS 45334

² *Daily News*, May 2nd, 1895

"Again and again it must be said that in this determination we shall be justified when the working-classes make it their determination, and . . . the first step towards this consummation is the union in one party of all those in the movement who take that view of the movement, and not merely the gas and water and improved trade union view. The view not of improved condition for the workers but of essentially changed position."¹

It is a moving situation. Morris was depressed because he saw the future too plain. He saw the movement he had helped to form, the charlatans and parliamentary cheap-jacks who would betray it, and lead it for secondary or personal ends. When he had first thrown in his lot with the Cause, he had told Hyndman that he desired only to *serve* the movement, in whatever manner he could be of use. Now, in 1895, Bruce Glasier visited him for the last time. He questioned Glasier closely about the I.L.P. and the movement in the North.

"He listened to my *apologia* attentively, sitting back in his chair smoking, keeping his eyes fixed on me reflectively while I spoke."

Glasier painted a picture of Keir Hardie and the I.L.P. in glowing terms. When he turned to leave,

"I remember that at the gate he held my hand longer than was his custom, and said, 'I have been greatly cheered by what you say about Keir Hardie and the Labour movement. Our theories often blind us to the truth.' Then, laying his hand on my shoulder, he said, 'Ah, lad! if the workers are *really* going to march—won't we all fall in?'"²

And in those words he caught the true spirit of his twelve years of propagandist work.

VII *The Last Year*

In 1895, five years had passed since the founding of the Kelmscott Press. Morris's grey beard and hair were shading into white. From the autumn of 1892 until early in 1895 he had enjoyed a brief recovery of health. A letter of Halliday Sparling's, at Christmas 1892, reveals him at his favourite relaxation.

". . . We are all here at Kelmscott . . . except Mrs. Morris, who had to go to Italy for the winter. Shaw is also here, amusing himself by pasting into a scrap-book all the Press-notices of his play. . . . Morris

¹ *Justice*, May Day Special, 1898

² Glasier, *op cit.*, p. 139.

has just gone off to try for a pike, having vainly endeavoured to get either Shaw or myself to share his fishing enthusiasm . He is extremely well & hearty."¹

To the active Socialists, Morris still seemed "one of the most get-at-able men around London".² He was a well-known figure in the Hammersmith streets, or in the Underground Railway, where "armed with books and wearing a soft crowned felt hat and Inverness cape . he made his presence fully known by the loud cheery tones in which he discussed art, literature, or politics with his companions".³ But, although he scarcely noticed it himself, he was in a position of some intellectual isolation during his last years. As he walked up and down the aisle in the Kelmscott Clubroom, one observer thought he had "the air of a rather melancholy sea-captain on the quarter-deck".⁴ Few of the intellectuals who gathered there had any real understanding of his profound revolutionary aspirations. Wilfred Scawen Blunt (part courageous opponent of imperialism, part light-weight and cynic) saw something of him in these last years, and interpreted Morris's faint air of melancholy as disillusion in Socialism.⁵ The workers who saw him bare-headed by the Manchester Ship Canal knew better (see p. 731). But the story of Morris's "disillusion" was beginning to go the rounds among the intelligentsia, gathering force as all stories do which people want to believe.

Absorption in his work and his family made his contacts fewer during these years. He was writing, in odd moments, *The Wood Beyond the World*, *The Well at the World's End*, *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, and (in his last year) *The Sundering Flood*. When illness made him sleepless he would rise at dawn to continue his writing. From 1893 onwards he was co-operating with A. J. Wyatt in a version of *Beowulf* and other early English poetry. He was busy in the experiments which always gave him such pleasure, learning old processes for making the paper and ink to be used at the Kelmscott Press. From 1893 onwards he found ceaseless relaxation in the designing and production of the great

¹ H. H. Sparling to E. Radford, December 24th, 1892, Radford MSS.

² *Labour Leader*, October 10th, 1896. ³ *Ibid*

⁴ F. M. Ford, *Return to Yesterday*, p. 110.

⁵ See Blunt, *My Diaries*, Part One, pp. 28, 65, 70.

Kelmscott Chaucer. "My eyes! how good it is!" he said, when the first page was complete.¹ When his old friend Magnússon visited him in his last year, and praised the Chaucer, Morris rejoined with enthusiasm: "It is not only the finest book in the world, but an undertaking that was an absolutely unchecked success from beginning to end"² At the same time, Morris was still executing occasional designs for the Firm, and he was working once again with Magnússon—this time on a translation of the *Heimskringla*. Some contact he maintained outside the Hammer-smith Socialist Society and the colleagues in his artistic work by attending, occasionally, the "Socialist Supper Club" and, more regularly, the Committee of Anti-Scrape. Indeed, his public work for this Society increased in his last four years. In 1893 he took a prominent part in resisting drastic proposals for the restoration of the spire of Great St. Mary's, Oxford. In 1894 he was resisting a proposed addition to Westminster Abbey, which he described as "in a special degree the work of the *people* of the country in past times". In 1895 he was protesting, as one "born and bred in its neighbourhood", at the destruction of the special character of Epping Forest by the wholesale felling of hornbeams. "this strange, unexampled, and most romantic wood" was, he urged, in danger of being turned into a commonplace park or golf grounds.³

Thereafter came a spate of protests at the proposed restoration of the Royal Tombs in Westminster Abbey, at the rebuilding, in red brick, of a lock-keeper's cottage by the Thames Conservators in the grey stone village of Kelmscott, at the restoration of the cathedrals of Rouen, Peterborough, Chichester. More often than not the protests met with failure. the inroads of commercialism into the countryside could not be checked. Seeing, in August, 1895, a favourite barn transformed with a zinc and iron roof, he felt "quite sickened".

"That's the way all things are going now. In twenty years everything will be gone in this countryside, which twenty years ago was so rich in beautiful buildings, and we can do nothing to help it or mend it. The world had better say, 'Let us be through with it and see what will come after it!' Meanwhile, I can do nothing but a little bit of Anti-Scrape . . .

¹ Mackail, II, p. 284.

² *Cambridge Review*, November 26th, 1896.

³ See *Letters*, pp. 354, 358, 363-9, and Mackail, II, pp. 314 f.

Now that I am grown old and see that nothing is to be done, I half wish that I had not been born with a sense of romance and beauty in this accursed age. ."

It is not clear whether it was this reflection, or some personal incident, which provoked the wry reflection in his same letter to "Georgie".

"I was thinking how I have wasted the many times when I have been 'hurt' and (especially of late years) have made no sign, but swallowed down my sorrow and anger, and nothing done' Whereas if I had but gone to bed and stayed there for a month or two and declined taking any part in life I can't help thinking that it might have been very effective. Perhaps you remember that this game was tried by some of my Icelandic heroes, and seemingly with great success" ¹

By the summer of 1895 it was evident, beyond any reasonable doubt, that Morris's strength was gradually failing. He could no longer take strenuous walks, and even his favourite relaxation of fishing had lost its charm "It is sad", Burne-Jones (now, to Morris's disappointment, Sir Edward)² wrote in the autumn, "to see even *his* enormous vitality diminishing."³ During the work of the Press they had been much together, Burne-Jones falling in with delight into all Morris's projects His admiration for Morris (despite his abhorrence of Socialism) was still that of his Oxford days. "Morris will be here to-morrow", he wrote in 1891—

"strong, self-contained, master of himself and therefore of the world Solitude cannot hurt him or dismay him Such strength as his I see nowhere" ⁴

Now, as Morris saw the end drawing near, a wistful note came into their long relationship One day, while the work on the Chaucer was going on apace, and a Kelmscott Malory and Froissart were dimly projected ahead, Morris remarked to his friend. "The best way of lengthening out the rest of our days now, old chap, is to finish off our old things."⁵ If he had admitted, two years before, in "The Deeper Meaning of the Struggle", that

¹ *Letters*, p. 374.

² It is related (*Stirling, op cit.*, p. 210) that on the evening previous to Burne-Jones receiving his baronetcy he dined with Morris, but was too nervous to inform his friend The subject was never mentioned between them thereafter

³ *Memorials*, II, p. 268.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 216.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 268.

he felt that his own art was only "a survival of the organic art of the past" (see p 771), yet still his service for the Socialist cause had rid him of his old sense of guilt at his own self-indulgence. "I am afire to see the new designs", he wrote to Burne-Jones—"and as to the age, that be blowed!"¹ He had not lost his delight at "the beauty of the earth", but a letter written to "Georgie" in November from Rottingdean, shows an intermingling of reminiscence and regret for his passing strength

"I started out at ten and went to a chalk pit near (where you took me one hot evening in September, you remember), and I walked on thence a good way, and should have gone further, but prudence rather than weariness turned me back. They were ploughing a field at the bottom with no less than ten teams of great big horses—they were knocking off for their beer just as I came on them, and seemed very jolly, and my heart went out to them, both men and horses."²

Two months later, walking back from his last meeting of Anti-Scape, a friend who noted his weakness, commented politely that it was the worst time of the year. "No, it ain't," he replied; "it's a very fine time of the year indeed. I'm getting old, that's what it is."³

In the summer months of 1895 his Socialist activity had dropped off to the very minimum—infrequent attendance at the Hammersmith Clubroom and the Socialist Supper Club. Now, as if with a deliberate and conscious effort, he picked up some of the old threads. He would at least nail the lie that he was turning from Socialism before he died. On September 15th he was lecturing at Hammersmith, on October 6th he was Chairman for Shaw for the last time, on October 30th, at the request of Hines, the old League propagandist and chimney-sweep, he visited Oxford and inaugurated the Oxford Socialist Union before a large and enthusiastic audience; in December he lectured again, and took the chair for the last time for his old friend Bax.⁴ On December 28th he made his last open-air speech—in a foggy drizzle outside Waterloo Station. The occasion was the funeral of Sergius Stepniak, who had been killed by a railway train. A speaker who preceded him said that Stepniak, in his later years, had abandoned his revolutionary outlook and become an advocate

¹ Mackail, II, p 319

² *Letters*, p 378.

³ Mackail, II, p 320.

⁴ Hammersmith Minutes

of Fabianism. When Morris's turn to speak came, he had no hesitation in refuting the slander

"This is a lie—to suggest that Stepniak had ceased to be a revolutionary. He died as he had lived, a revolutionary to the end"¹

"I have *not* changed my mind on Socialism", Morris wrote to an American correspondent on January 9th, 1896. On January 3rd, he attended the New Year's meeting of the London S.D.F. at Holborn Town Hall. He was received with tumultuous applause. George Lansbury moved a resolution of international fraternal greetings, and William Morris came forward as seconder. He congratulated the S.D.F.,² and then—it was the time of the Jameson Raid—he turned to the subject which had first brought him into the movement, imperialism.

"As far as Africa was concerned [he said] there was a kind of desperation egging on all the nations to make something of that hitherto undeveloped country, and they were no doubt developing it with a vengeance. (Laughter and cheers) When he saw the last accounts about the Transvaal he almost wished he could be a Kaffir for five minutes in order to dance around the 'ring' (Laughter and cheers) He thought it was a case of a pack of thieves quarrelling about their booty. The Boers had stolen their land from the people it had belonged to, people had come in to help them 'develop' their stolen property, and now wanted to steal it themselves (Laughter and cheers) The real fact, however, that we had to deal with was that we lived by stealing—that was, by wasting—all the labour of the workmen"³

On January 5th he lectured for the last time in the Clubroom. His subject was "One Socialist Party", but the notes of his lecture have not survived.

His active work for the movement was now over. The next day he entered in his diary, "Could not sleep at night got up and worked from 1 to 4 at Sundering Flood"⁴ On January 31st he spoke, for the last time in public, at a meeting of the Society

¹ R. Page Arnot, *William Morris: a Vindication*, p. 21. For a report of the funeral, at which Keir Hardie, John Burns, Eleanor Marx-Aveling, and Kropotkin also spoke, see *The Times*, December 30th, 1895.

² *Labour Leader*, January 25th, 1896, quotes Morris as describing Hyndman's election campaign at Burnley as a "remarkable event" "As he was not a member of the S.D.F. he could praise them for holding aloft the real flag of revolution."

³ *Justice*, January 11th, 1896.

⁴ Diary for 1896, Brit. Mus. Add. MSS. 45411.

for Checking the Abuses of Public Advertising He began to be anxious that he would not live to see the finished Chaucer "I'd like it finished to-morrow", he said "Every day beyond to-morrow is one too many"¹ In February the existence of diabetes, and complicating conditions, was confirmed "I don't feel any better so weak", he noted in his diary at the end of the month. He was working on a new prose romance, *Kilian of the Close*, whose hero was touched with his own mood "On a day when the sun was just set, he sat in his hall by the fire under the luffer, turning over uncheery thoughts in his mind It was midmost March, and the wind swept up the bent and clattered on the hall-windows and moaned in the wall-nook, and the night drew on and seemed entering the wall from the grey world without as if it would presently tell him that there should never be another day." By the end of April he seems to have recognized that his life was over "My dear fellow", he wrote to Philip Webb, "it was very kind of you to write to me and to want to know how I am. Well, I am not getting on, I say that in all calmness. I am afraid I am rather weaker than stronger. . ."² And to "Georgie" he wrote from Kelmscott Manor: "Down in this deep quiet, away from the excitements of business and callers, and doctors, one is rather apt to brood, and I fear that I have made myself very disagreeable at times"³ It was in this frame of mind that he set himself to write an article for the special May Day number of *Justice* Once again he summoned up his mental energies, writing with his old fire, revealing that profound quality of moral insight which marks his best passages at once as "William Morris". There can be no doubt that he intended the article as a final testament to the movement.

What wonder that he chose as his theme "imperialism"? Imperialism—which had brought him to Socialism; imperialism—fomenter of wars and bestial slaughter, and last hope of capitalism drawing to its end, imperialism—corrupter of the moral health of the labour movement, already entering into it like a spreading stain, enabling the workers to win their limited reforms at the expense of colonial people's misery. Even the S.D.F. was not free from its taint, as Morris, from his long association with Hyndman, well knew. In January, 1896, the

¹ Mackail, II, p 322² *Letters*, pp 382-3³ *Ibid*, p 382

S.D.F. Executive had issued a Manifesto in which Hyndman's disastrous "Big Navy" policy (which Morris and Engels had detected beneath *England for All* in 1883, and which later led him directly into his capitulation in the First Great War) was shadowed forth

"To the adequate increase of our Navy no reasonable man can object. The navy is not an anti-democratic force, and can scarcely be used for aggression under present conditions. The Atlantic and the Pacific are now our Mediterranean Sea, and a nation like ours . . . cannot afford to take such risks in the future as we have taken in the past."¹

Indeed there is no wonder that Morris chose this theme!

Many still think, he wrote,

"that civilization will grow so speedily and triumphantly, and production will become so easy and cheap, that the possessing classes will be able to spare more and more from the great heap of wealth to the producing classes . . . and all will be peace and prosperity. A futile hope indeed, and one which a mere glance at past history will dispel. For we find as a matter of fact that when we were emerging from semi-barbarism, when open violence was common, and privilege need put on no mask before the governed classes, the workers were not worse off than now, but better. In short, not all the discoveries of science, not all the tremendous organization of the factory and the market will produce true wealth, so long as the end and aim of it all is the production of profit for the privileged classes.

"Nothing better will happen than more waste and more, only perhaps exercised in different directions than now it is. Waste of material, waste of labour . . . Waste, in one word, of LIFE.

"But . . . some will say, 'Yes, indeed, the capitalist system can come to no good end, death in a dustbin is its doom, but will not its end be at least speedy even without any help of ours?' My friends I fear not. The capitalist classes are doubtless alarmed at the spread of Socialism all over the civilized world. They have at least an instinct of danger, but with that instinct comes the other one of self-defence. Look how the whole capitalist world is stretching out long arms towards the barbarous world and grabbing and clutching in eager competition at countries whose inhabitants don't want them, nay, in many cases, would rather die in battle, like the valiant men they are, than have them. So perverse are these wild men before the blessings of civilisation which would do nothing worse for them (and also nothing better) than reduce them to a propertyless proletariat.

"And what is all this for? For the spread of abstract ideas of civilization, for pure benevolence, for the honour and glory of conquest? Not

¹ *Justice*, January 18th, 1896.

at all It is for the opening of fresh markets to take in all the fresh profit-producing wealth which is growing greater and greater every day, in other words, to make fresh opportunities for *waste*, the waste of our labour and our lives

"And I say this is an irresistible instinct on the part of the capitalists, an impulse like hunger, and I believe that it can only be met by another hunger, the hunger for freedom and fair play for all, both people and peoples Anything less than that the capitalist power will brush aside. But that they cannot, for what will it mean? The most important part of their machinery, the 'hands' becoming MEN, and saying, 'Now at last we will it, we will produce no more for profit but for *use*, for *happiness*, for LIFE'"¹

It was generally known that Morris was coming to the end of his life From Germany, Liebknecht sent his last fraternal greetings

"It is a great debt which I owe to your country. The twelve years of exile I spent there gave me my political education And your working classes have been my teacher

"*Au revoir*, dear Morris! My wife, who translated your splendid *News from Nowhere*, sends her love"²

His Sunday morning visits to "Georgie" and Ned Burne-Jones at the Grange were now discontinued—one February Sunday in the middle of breakfast he had leant his forehead on his hand, and Burne-Jones had written in alarm "It is a thing I have never seen him do before in all the years I have known him."³ In June he was convalescing in Folkestone "I toodle about, and sit down, lean over the chains, and rather enjoy it, especially if there are any craft about."⁴ He still had energy to explode to Philip Webb about the hideous ribbon-development along the coast—"But 'tis an old story!" The Hammersmith Socialist Society continued the work in his absence, the unbroken series of Sunday lectures went on, and candidates were put up, in alliance with the I.L.P., for the vestry elections But attendance at business meetings had fallen to an average of twelve, and throughout the whole summer, from May to October, only five open-air meetings were held—a falling-off which revealed only too clearly how dependent the Society was upon the driving force of its founder

¹ *Justice*, May Day Special, 1896 Reprinted in part in May Morris, II, pp 361-3

² Brit Mus Add MSS 45346 ³ *Memorials*, II, p 277

⁴ Morris to Philip Webb, June 14th, 1896, *Letters*, p 383

In August, 1896, Burne-Jones was writing to Swinburne, describing the progress on the Chaucer. "I abstained from decorating certain of the Canterbury Tales. . . . Morris has been urgent with me that I should by no means exclude these stories from our scheme of adornment—especially he had hopes of my treatment of the Miller's Tale, but he ever had more robust and daring parts than I could assume"

"It has been a wretched sight all this year to see him dwindling away I am old and though I work away it is with a heavy heart often, as if it didn't matter whether I finished my work or not . . ."¹

In July Morris had been recommended by his doctors and friends to take a sea voyage. He had a yearning to return to the North, and chose to go to the coast of Norway and as far as Spitzbergen. He was already "so ill and weak that is impossible for me to do any work"² "I am going with what amount of hope I can muster, which varies, to say sooth, from a good deal to very little", he wrote to Swinburne, when sending him a copy of the at last completed Chaucer.³ It seemed possible that he might have to make the journey alone, but at the last moment his old Socialist friend, John Carruthers, was able to join him. Hyndman visited him before he left, and recalled that he said:

"If it merely means that I am to be laid up for a little while it doesn't so much matter, you know; but if I am to be caged up here for months, and then it is to be the end of all things, I shouldn't like it at all. This has been a jolly world to me and I find plenty to do in it"⁴

The journey was not a success, and aroused none of his old enthusiasm although he appeared to pick up a little in his health.⁵ On his return in mid-August it was clear that he was gravely ill—too ill even to be removed to Kelmscott Manor, as he desired.

From Norway he had sent a telegram of greetings to the International Socialist Workers' Congress in London, at which Tom Mann and Keir Hardie gave fraternal addresses, but which in its result was dominated by the Anarchists. Now he was too

¹ Edward Burne-Jones to Algernon Swinburne, August 8th, 1896, Brotherton Collection, Leeds

² Morris to A. J. Wyatt, July 13th, 1896, *Letters*, p. 384

³ *Letters*, p. 384

⁴ *Justice*, October 6th, 1896

⁵ MSS recollections of the journey, by John Carruthers, are preserved in Brit. Mus. Add. MSS. 45350, but recount little of interest.

weak to do more than design a few letters for the Press, and to dictate a conclusion to *The Sundering Flood* "Come soon", he wrote to "Georgie", "I want a sight of your dear face"¹ To Glasier he wrote, on September 3rd, in a pitifully shaky hand.

"So many thanks to you for your kind notes I am really very ill but am trying to get better Fraternally, W M"²

"Morris is dying slowly", Cobden-Sanderson wrote in his diary, shocked for a moment, out of his own self-absorption

"It is an astonishing spectacle He sits speechless waiting for the end to come. . . Darkness . . . soon will envelop all the familiar scene, the sweet river, England green and grey, Kelmscott, Kelmscott House, the trees the Press, the passage, the Bindery, the light coming in through the windows the old books on the shelves . . . 'But', he said to Mary de Morgan, 'but I cannot believe that I shall be annihilated' "³

In his weakness, his strong emotional control was relaxed. When "Georgie" said something of the life of the poor, he broke into tears. Arnold Dolmetsch brought his virginals to the house, and at the opening phrase of a pavan and galliard by William Byrd Morris cried out with joy, and, after the pieces had been repeated, was so moved that he could bear no more. He took the greatest delight in some illuminated manuscripts, lent to him from the Dorchester House library On October 3rd, near the age of sixty-three, he died peacefully. almost his last words were, "I want to get mumbo-jumbo out of the world". His family doctor pronounced with "unhesitation" that "he died a victim to his enthusiasm for spreading the principles of Socialism". Another doctor had a different diagnosis "I consider the case is this the disease is simply being William Morris, and having done more work than most ten men."⁴

So often had the Socialists met with Jane Morris's disapproval that they feared to intrude upon her at the funeral at Lechlade The Hammersmith comrades were there, of course, and a few others—John Burns and Jack Williams, Walter Crane, Kropotkin and some foreign refugees. Perhaps the absent comrades were

¹ Mackail, II, p 332

² Glasier MSS

³ *Journals of T J Cobden-Sanderson*, entry for September 12th, 1896

⁴ Mackail, II, p 336

mistaken. Certainly Cunninghame Graham, old comrade of "Bloody Sunday", half aristocratic adventurer and half Socialist, thought they were. Morris had liked the man but—he had complained—"he's too bloody politeful".¹ In the *Saturday Review* next week Graham threw politeness to "the North-West Wind".

"Seen through the gloom at Paddington . . . were gathered those whom England had sent forth to pay respects to the most striking figure of our times

"Artists and authors, archæologists, with men of letters, Academicians, the pulpit, stage, the Press, the statesmen . . . all otherwise engaged

"Philanthropists agog about Armenia, Cuba, and Crete, spouting of Turks and infidels and foreign cruelties, whilst he who strove for years for Englishmen lay in a railway waggon . . .

"So we reached Oxford, and found upon the platform no representatives . . . and no undergraduates to throng the station. True, it was Long Vacation, but had the body of some Bulawayo Burglar [Cecil Rhodes] happened to pass, they all had been there . . . Sleeping but stertorous, the city lay girt in its throng of jerry buildings, quite out of touch with all mankind, keeping its sympathy for piffing commentators on Menander . . ."

There was no mere rhetoric here for Cunninghame Graham broke down next week, while speaking at a memorial meeting, and was unable to continue. But, for all that, the final ceremony was not unfitting. The coffin was borne to the church in an open haycart, festooned with willow-boughs, alder and bullrushes. Among the small group of mourners were his close friends, like Ned Burne-Jones, workmen from Merton Abbey, the villagers from Kelmscott, and members of the Art Workers' Guild. "Inside the church was decorated for a harvest festival, the lamps all wreathed with ears of oats and barley, whilst round the font . . . lay pumpkins, carrots, and sheaves of corn." Throughout the whole day there raged the storming wind from the north.

It was not to be expected that the Hammersmith Socialist Society would survive his death. Some members were Fabians, some art workers drawn by Morris's influence alone, some inclined towards the I.L.P. or the S.D.F. The Clubroom would have to be vacated, anyway, for Jane Morris would hardly have

¹ See A. S. Tschiffeley, *Don Roberto*. Cunninghame Graham's opinion of Morris was that he was like "a bull bison surrounded by a pack of wolves".

wished it to remain in their hands. In November, readings were given from "Monopoly" and *The Dream of John Ball*. Thirty-six members were present at the special meeting which agreed to discontinue the activities which Morris's energies had driven forward for over twelve years. On December 11th the last lecture was delivered, and the Clubroom, where every Socialist leader in Britain must have spoken, was closed.

"As I was putting the first mouthfuls into my mouth, my eye caught a carved and gilded inscription on the panelling . . . Thus it ran:

" 'Guests and neighbours, on the site of this Guest-hall once stood the lecture-room of the Hammersmith Socialists. Drink a glass to the memory! May, 1962 ' "

Is there yet time to make it true?

VIII *Last Tributes*

"Well do I remember that grey October morning", recalled Alf. Mattison, the Leeds engineer and Leaguer, "when—amid the rattle of riveters' hammers [and] the whirl of machinery . . .—a fellow shopmate, who shared my admiration for William Morris, shouted the sad news to me through the tube-plate of a boiler . . . that he, the inspirer of my youthful ideals, had passed away"¹ Hundreds and thousands of workers, comrades known and unknown to Morris, sorrowed at the news. In Portland Gaol, Fred Charles, still serving his long sentence for the "Walsall Case", met Edward Carpenter with tears in his eyes. "He spoke very feelingly . . . said he had always looked forward to seeing him again. . ."² The Hammersmith comrades, who had spoken side by side with him so often at Hammersmith Bridge, discussed him on their way to the funeral.

"Kindly but choleric, the verdict was, apt to break into fury, easily appeased, large-hearted, open-handed, and the 'sort of bloke you always could depend on' "³

"The greatest man that ever lived on this planet", wrote one of them afterwards, a postal worker.⁴ "He is my greatest human

¹ Papers of Alf. Mattison

² *Freedom*, December, 1896

³ Cunningham Graham, "With the North-West Wind", *The Saturday Review*, October 10th, 1896

⁴ R. A. Muncey, in *The Leaguer*, October, 1907

topic", wrote Leatham, of Aberdeen.¹ "To me he was the greatest man in the world", wrote Glasier: and in his dairy, on the day he heard the news he entered. "Socialism seems all quite suddenly to have gone from its summer into its winter time. William Morris and Kelmscott House no more!"² For him, alas, the entry was only too true, and, with Morris's influence departed, his revolutionary days were done

Justice and *Freedom* wore black, but it was Blatchford in the *Clarion* who voiced the mood of the thousands.

"I cannot help thinking that it does not matter what goes into the *Clarion* this week, because William Morris is dead . . . He was our best man, and he is dead . . .

"I have just been reading the obituary notices in some of the London papers, and I feel sick and sorry. The fine phrases, the elaborate compliments, the ostentatious parade of their own erudition, and the little covert sneers at the Socialism Morris loved all the tawdry upholsteries of these journalistic undertakers seems like desecration . . . Morris was not only a genius, he was a *man*. Strike at him where you would, he rang true."

A poem in *Justice*, by J. Leslie, voiced the same feelings

"Oh! Of the many who may come anear you
A sorrow, greater, deeper, none may tell
Than we the poor can, for the love we bear you,
Our stainless Bayard, brave comrade—Farewell "

If he had failed to bring unity in his life, yet in the moment of his death the whole Socialist and progressive movement stood united in sympathy. From the *Labour Prophet* to *Freedom*, from Edward Carpenter to Cunninghame Graham and Harry Quelch, the same heartfelt tributes came. "We have lost our greatest man", wrote "Marxian" in the *Labour Leader*. "He was really our greatest man", Blunt noted in his diary. In Hammersmith Broadway, when the news was first abroad, "a young girl . . . wonderingly asked her mother, 'Is it *our* Mr. Morris?'" Resolutions came from every quarter in the next few days from the Walthamstow Branch of the Navvies and General Labourers' Union and from the Christian Socialist Union, from the Greenock Socialist Society and the South Salford S.D.F.; from a mass meeting of cab-drivers in Trafalgar Square, addressed by John

¹ *The Gateway*, January, 1941

² Glasier, *op cit*, p. 141

Burns; and from a hundred other parts of the labour movement. To the younger members of the Socialist movement Morris's name was already a legend. he was hardly thought of as on a level with ordinary mortal men. After his last propagandist visit to Manchester, the *Clarion* had printed some verses "On hearing William Morris address an open-air meeting at Trafford Bridge . . .", which were certainly not in language of which old Joseph Lane would have approved¹

"Like an archangel in the morning sun
 He stood with a high message, and men heard
 The rousing syllables, and scarcely stirred,
 Rough though they were, until the tale was done.
 Then there arose full many a doubting one,
 Who craved interpretation of a word
 So big with meaning, but so long deferred
 And the great Poet scorned to answer none
 I followed him with a dim sense of awe,
 The battle of the streets was round him now,
 Unwittingly the witless crowd went by;
 And scarce a soul in all the city saw
 The lambent glory playing on his brow,
 Or guessed, that morning, that a King was nigh. . . ."¹

"Poetry is tommy-rot", Morris had remarked in an off-hand manner to Burne-Jones a few years before his death, and anyway, too much lambent glory on his brow might have interfered when he was eating. As he had remarked (this time emphatically) to Leatham, "I like pig!"² Effusions of the wonder-struck apart, what did the *workers* think of Morris, if they thought of him at all? Perhaps an account of the same Manchester visit, from another source, will give an insight. "The last time I saw Morris", Leatham wrote,

"he was speaking from a lorry pitched on a piece of waste land close to the Ship Canal . . . It was a wild March Sunday morning, and he would not have been asked to speak out of doors, but he had expressed a desire to do so, and so there he was, talking with quiet strenuousness, drawing a laugh now and then from the undulating crowd, of working men mostly, who stood in the hollow and on the slopes before him. There would be quite two thousand of them. He wore a blue overcoat, but had laid aside his hat, and his grizzled hair blew in wisps and tumbles about his face. In spite of the bitter cold of the morning,

¹ *Clarion*, March 31st, 1894.

² *The Gateway*, January, 1941

scarcely a man moved from the crowd, though there was comparatively little fire or fervour in the speech, and next to no allusion to any special topic of the hour. Many there were hearing and seeing the man for the first time; most of us were hearing him for the last time; and we all looked and listened as though we knew it."¹

An audience of two thousand on a cold morning in March, and scarcely a man moving till the talk, on the theory of Socialism, was ended—this is the *real* tribute Morris desired! It would not be true to say that the *masses* loved and honoured Morris, for the revolutionary movement of the people scarcely during his lifetime reached that point of conscious awakening.² But it is true that Morris had made firm contact, not with a few exceptional individuals, but with the advance-guard, the most conscious section, of the revolutionary proletariat. And it is true that no British intellectual since his time has been so trusted, loved and respected, amongst the most advanced of the workers as was William Morris. Through them he knew his aspirations would be fulfilled, and it was from a Lancashire branch of the S.D.F. that one of the most noble tributes came:

"Comrade Morris is not dead there is not a Socialist living who should believe him dead for he Lives in the heart of all true men and women still and will do so to the end of time"³

¹ *William Morris, Master of Many Crafts* (1908), pp 124, 127-8

² "I never forget when Morris died," wrote one skilled worker from the South "A handful of us were passing the *Western Daily Mercury* office, Plymouth, to attend a Socialist branch meeting, and the news just choked us. A crowd of workers had assembled to see a football result. The announcement was made that 'Mr William Morris died to-day' 'Who the hell's he' said a worker to another. Just after we heard a deafening roar. The Bashites had won!" (W F K Rean in the *A E U Monthly Journal and Report*, November, 1912)

³ Mackail, II, p. 347.