

THE ORIGINS OF THE REVOLT
OF THE BRITISH LABOUR MOVEMENT
FROM LIBERALISM

1875 - 1906

by

D. W. CROWLEY.

A thesis presented for the
degree of Ph.D.
University of London.

1952.

IMAGING SERVICES NORTH

Boston Spa, Wetherby

West Yorkshire, LS23 7BQ

www.bl.uk

BEST COPY AVAILABLE.

VARIABLE PRINT QUALITY

Abstract.

THE ORIGINS OF THE REVOLT OF THE
BRITISH LABOUR MOVEMENT FROM
LIBERALISM, 1872-1906.

D. W. Crowley.

The purpose of this thesis has been to attempt to account for the emergence of the British Labour Party in the years 1900-1906 by examining and correlating the relevant evidence from all fields of historical study. The conclusions reached are as follows. Firstly, that this event was not the result of a revolutionary change in the policy of the Labour movement, but of a relatively minor revision of judgment. The trade unionists had always been markedly independent in their attitude towards the Liberal Party and strongly critical of the existing economic system. But they had always regarded their industrial functions as being more effective than political activity, particularly since they were afraid of creating precedents for legislation on industrial matters that might be turned against them by a Parliament dominated by the employers. The main long-term factors that contributed to their abandonment of this attitude included a marked rise in the standards of living of the working-classes which greatly increased their ambition. Mounting discontent was also caused by the tightening of industrial discipline; and in addition the Liberal Party disappointed the workers' expectations of social reform. The main immediate factor in the creation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 was the decisive defeat of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers in their lock-out of 1897, which destroyed the confidence of the unions in their industrial strength. This disillusionment was completed and confirmed by the Taff Vale decision. Although the

socialist bodies played relatively little part in bringing about this change of policy, Keir Hardie's type of socialist thought reflected the working-class attitudes of the time rather closely, and thus made it possible for the unions to form a close alliance with the Independent Labour Party.

PREFACE.

This treatise is the result of an attempt to discover why in 1900-06, after a long period in which Labour politicians had worked with the Liberal Party, the British Labour movement set up a political party of its own. I have tried to look into every aspect of British life in the preceding period where it seemed there might be developments that contributed to this event, and have attempted as far as possible to correlate the material found. I believed that such a study was urgently needed. Firstly, it appeared to be needed for its own sake, for an event that has proved so momentous in the national life was surely ^{no} nothing less than the combined result of a large number of historical forces. And we are now far enough removed from the period to be able to see it in fairly adequate perspective: it seems, in fact, to be time for a new evaluation. Moreover, in the history of the Labour movement even more than in other fields of history, it can scarcely be possible to separate the material into compartments. Surely, for instance, we can never be confident of having adequately understood the development of the political side of the Labour movement in any period until we have placed it within the context of the changing situation in industry. If it has no other merit, I believe that this

present thesis show the necessity of such an approach.

Secondly, and for this same reason that it must be unprofitable to isolate contemporary events, such a study appeared to be needed to facilitate further research. While there is still a great deal of work to be done in filling in the detail of Labour history - in tracing the development of particular sections of the movement, such as the various unions, for example, and in the writing of biographical and local studies - it seemed to me that what was first required before this work could be adequately attempted was a better knowledge of the general course of development in order to throw further light upon the issues that were confronting the various sections and leaders. When this further, more detailed work is done, many of the conclusions of this present study will of course have to be re-examined. In other words, this is meant to be a tentative synthesis. Nevertheless I have gone to the primary source materials and attempted to cover them as closely as seemed possible in the circumstances.

I regret that in some chapters it has seemed necessary to proceed by the method of contesting certain interpretations which appear to be fairly generally held. Since these views are common, even if sometimes only implicit, I thought it best

for the sake of clarity to make my disagreement explicit, even at the risk of appearing to erect Aunt Sallies just for the sake of knocking them down. One difficulty has been that certain striking utterances of leading figures in the movement have often been put forward as evidence when in my belief they have not been typical of the sections of opinion they might seem to represent: there is such a tremendous wealth of material and the statements of leading men even from the same section of the movement are so often contradictory that the writer can only be as careful as possible in selecting what he believes to be typical and offer assurances that his judgments, if far from infallible, have been duly weighed.

Although the opinions expressed in this study are entirely my own, I have received a great deal of help and encouragement from more persons than I can name individually. Foremost has been my supervisor, Mr. H. L. Beales, who often knew what was at the back of my mind before I had realised it myself. His remarkable knowledge of sources and sympathetic guidance and criticism were invaluable. I am also indebted to members of the staffs of the British Library of Political Science, Bishopsgate Institute, British Museum, Trades Union Congress Library, National Library of Scotland, Mitchell Library, Glasgow, and the Public Libraries of Newcastle,

Bristol, Cardiff, Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool, and the University and Public Libraries, Aberdeen, several of whom allowed me unusual and unsolicited privileges. I owe similar indebtedness to many officials of trade unions, trades and Labour councils and Labour Party branches, and am grateful for an opportunity to question Professor G. D. H. and Mrs. M. Cole. I am also grateful to the London School of Economics and Political Science for awarding me a Leverhulme Research Studentship for two years for the purpose of carrying out this work. To no-one do I owe more in the labour of preparing this thesis than to my wife.

v.

C O N T E N T S.

Chapter

Page

I. STARTING-POINT AND PORTENTS:
BRITISH LABOUR IN THE SEVENTIES.

1	"Amalgamated" Unionism	1
2	The Political Activity of the "Old" Unionists in the Sixties and Seventies	39
3	Unions outside the "Amalgamated" Group and the Unskilled Unions of the Seventies	73

II. CHANGING MILIEU.

4	Economic Change: (a) The Standard of Living of the Workers, 1870-1900	94
	(b) The Condition of the Workers in the "Great Depression"	111
	(c) The Position of the Workers in the Changing Economy	140
5	Social Change	161
6	The Movement of Ideas: Liberalism in the Eighties	187 +

III. BEGINNINGS OF REVOLT.

7	The Current in the Trades Union Congresses, 1880-1889	222	✓
8	The Contribution of the Socialist Societies ..	260	✓
9	The Contribution of the Fabian Society	283	
10	The Legal Eight Hours Campaign as an Index to the Movement; the Miners: (a) The Eight Hours Campaign	302.	✓
	(b) The "New" Movement and the Miners	332	✓
11	The Contribution of the "New" Unions	347/	✓

ChapterPage

IV. THE ORIGINS OF THE MOVEMENT
AS REVEALED IN ITS DEVELOPMENT.

12	The Contribution of the Independent Labour Party:	
	(a) Precursors of the ILP	431 ✓
	(b) Keir Hardie and the ILP	468 ✓
13	Filling the Religious Void: the Movement as a Religious Phenomenon	517 -
14	The Development of the Revolt in the Trades Union Congresses, 1890-1899:	
	(a) 1890-1895	544 ✓
	(b) 1895-1899	579 ✓
15	The Development of the Movement in Two "Old" Unions:	600
	(a) The Amalgamated Society of Engineers ..	601
	(b) The National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives	637

V. CONCLUSION.

16	Summary and Conclusions	657 -
17	The Labour Representation Committee and the Taff Vale Decision	670
	Bibliography	708

CHAPTER 1.

"AMALGAMATED" UNIONISM.

In the general election of 1906, to the astonishment of the British public, a bloc of more than fifty Labour members was returned to the House of Commons. More astonishingly still, no fewer than 29 of these men had stood independently of the Liberal Party, and about half of them were Socialists, the first group from that absurd, naive, unpractical sect to enter the House. The Labour movement had become a front-rank political force. Modern political history had begun; the disappearance of the great Liberal Party was foreshadowed in the very moment of its last famous victory.

What did this all mean? At the time the political writers were uneasy in their explanation^s, and for all the passage of nearly half a century, it is more than possible that their successors know little more now. What had happened in the electorates? Why had virtually the entire Labour movement, except for the miners, taken ^{on} a new allegiance? What did the workers want from Parliament?

Perhaps they did not really know themselves.

The purpose of this study is to examine the origin, and thus the nature, of this development. The attempt will be made to answer such questions as these; to what extent was this movement due to the growth of Socialist influence? to what extent, if any, was it connected with the "new unionism" of 1889-90? and why did it occur when it did?

Although these questions demand an analytical rather than a chronological treatment, it will be necessary, of course, first to move back a few decades to look for the earliest portents of the change and appreciate the situation in which it took place. Moreover, the question at once arises of the extent to which the new movement was a completely new departure. Was it really a political revolution; ^{or} was it rather a development, without any marked break in continuity, from the industrial and political activities of the trade unionism of the seventies? In other words, were the old "Liberal-Labour" leaders very different in attitude from the new "independent Labour" men? Assuming for the moment that there was some connection between the "new unionism" of 1889 and the independent Labour political movement, was there any essential difference between the "new" unionism and the

"old"? The first contribution to an answer must be to discuss some of the characteristics of the Labour movement in the seventies. As it would require a whole treatise to itself, a complete study of the "old unionism" is not possible here, (and no-one has yet made such a study); emphasis will be placed on those aspects of the policies of the seventies which are generally thought to have been very different from the characteristics of "new unionism. And still a further qualification is necessary; the term "old unionism" is used here to refer to the type of the great "amalgamated" unions of the seventies and eighties, the pattern established by William Allan of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers and Robert Applegarth of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, that is generally supposed and was believed by the Webbs to have served as a model for the bulk of the unions of this period. The fact that this is scarcely true, will be discussed in a later chapter.

Broadly speaking, the distinction between "old" and "new" unions is generally made as follows, that while the former were exclusive organisations of the craft workers, buttressed with such an elaborate array of friendly benefits that they were friendly societies at least as much as industrial bodies, and unaggressive in policy, the latter

took in the unskilled workers, disdained the use of benefits, appealed to the solidarity and common interests of wage-earners as a class, and were aggressive in industrial and political activity. Decriing the use of the strike as a method of settling industrial disputes, the "old unionists" preferred to bring the employers to meet them in conciliation and arbitration, and therefore accepted the basis of the capitalist economic system; consistently with this attitude in the industrial field, they were Liberals in politics - allies of their industrial employers. The "new unions", or so the legend continues, frequently made use of the strike as a matter of principle, were markedly antagonistic to the employing class, challenged the whole basis of the social-economic order and accordingly were mostly Socialists. The validity of this comparison as it affects the "new" unions' will have to be discussed later;—it may be stated here that it is very far from the truth; the question to be considered now is how far it is an accurate representation of the "old unionism".

It is far from being accurate. The "new" unions were not as different from the "old" as is generally supposed - firstly because they approximated more closely to the general conception of the "old union" type, and

secondly because the "old unions" themselves were by no means the timid, subservient bodies of common reputation.

In the first place, it must be remembered that the "old" unions had themselves been "new" unions in their day. In the sixties, when they were founded, the existing societies were loosely organised, crude in their methods, and scarcely respectable enough in general tone to obtain the confidence of the public, and in fact deliberately avoided any association with the authorities as unprofitable. Most of them were loosely associated confederations of local societies. The "amalgamated" unions represented an attempt, by means of close organisation on a national scale, by efficient book-keeping and greater systematisation of financial methods, and by pleading the reasonableness of their cause before public opinion and thus obtaining official and legal recognition, to acquire much greater power than these primitive older societies. And the "amalgamateds" had been remarkably successful. The "amalgamated" system had proved a highly efficient form of unionism; there was a good deal of justification for their claim to be "scientific" unions. For all their limitations, they had so many advantages that it is difficult to suggest any alternative to their methods that could have

been half as valuable, not only at that time, but for several generations later. Moreover, they were far from being as lethargic or timid as has often been alleged.

For instance, the fact that the "old" unions were organised as friendly societies and paid a great deal of attention to the administration of their benefits does not mean, as has often been stated, that they gave only second place to their industrial activities. Although they well realised the usefulness of the benefits in holding their societies together, admitting quite openly that many of their members kept up their loyalty and contributions primarily because of the financial stake they held in the fortunes of the union, the "old" leaders were always very clear on the point that the main purpose of the benefit system was industrial. While the allowances also gave social security that was very worth-while in itself, their primary function was to strengthen a worker from having, through destitution, to sell his labour at less than the standard rate of wages. They were a further and most important device to keep up the standard,⁽¹⁾ Moreover

1. Howell makes this point many times in his books, as also do the Webbs in "Industrial Democracy". See particularly M.S. by Howell in the Bishopsgate Institute; "The Provident Side of Trade Unionism and Its Economic Aspects", in which he charges the "new unionist" critics with having no real understanding of the functioning of the system; also his Labour Legislation, Labour Movements and Labour Leaders II 450; and Industrial Democracy, 160.

the benefit funds provided a very imposing strike treasury which made the employers much more hesitant to enter upon a trial of strength, and which the unions showed little hesitation in raiding when engaged in a contest. And they were always very strongly opposed to any suggestion that the strike and benefit funds should be required by law to be kept separate, as was often proposed by the employers.

Thus the "old" unionists, having an additional industrial weapon in their armoury as well as an extra reserve of fighting strength, were less frequently forced to resort to a strike. But this does not mean, for all their depreciation of strikes -- which was quite sincere, for few responsible wage-earners have ever taken pleasure in the use of strike action, and ~~it~~ was no more than has been voiced time and again by unionists of all types -- that they believed these could always be avoided or should be undertaken only very rarely. George Howell for instance, who was the main apologist of "old unionism", described strikes as "an essential part of the economy of capital and labour, and the natural and inevitable outcome of the relationship now subsisting between employers and employed" (2

The "old" unionists were very genuinely alarmed by the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1871, precisely because of its effect in making strike-action almost impossible. Like all responsible unionists, they regarded strike action as a last resort, but a very necessary one.

How ambitious were the "old" unionists - how high, for instance, did they believe the level of wages could be forced? Were they generally satisfied with the capitalist economic order? As one would expect, they did not seem to think it ~~was~~ possible to achieve very great gains for the workers through the use of industrial action. All that they appear to have attempted was to bring wages up to their "natural" or "true" level under capitalism, by making the wage-contract the product of a true bargain between equals. (3) Although they repudiated the wage-fund doctrine, Howell claiming that he himself had challenged it publicly and publicised economists' reputations of it as early as 1860 (4), their usual plea that by making competition truly effective they were only obtaining for the wage-earner what his work was really "worth" does seem to show a measure of acceptance of the teachings of contemporary economics.

3. Howell; Conflicts of Capital and Labour, 372.

4. Ibid, 221; see also 380.

Howell at least does not explicitly question the justice of this analysis, nor the justice of the profits that would still accrue to the employers under such conditions; and appears to have been reasonably satisfied with the best rates that artisans were receiving. And this attitude does, of course, seem to imply acceptance of the capitalist economic order. But Howell was rather more timid than most "old" unionists, and it must also be remembered that he was writing an apologium for unionism, mainly for the ears of employers and worded in the usual form of their own arguments. Such apologia are surely not to be read too literally. As will be seen when the politics of the "old" union leaders are discussed, there are definite signs that they had a very different economic system as their ultimate goal. However they still had a great deal of ground to make up even in the competitive system and very rightly turned ^{their main attention} to this purpose. Even so they had to be diligent at the very least to obtain as much as they sought and preserve what they already held. Possibly, as S.D.H. Cole thinks⁽⁵⁾ they did become less aggressive after the Great Depression, many of the leaders in any case having become older men in the meantime. But there is little sign that

5. Cole: Some Notes on British Trade Unionism in the Third Quarter of the Nineteenth Century, International Review for Social History II 1937.

this process went very far -- they were still far from being passive, and there is still any number of strikes persistently reported through the eighties. Although reference is often made in this connection to the close control exercised by the executives of the amalgamated unions over their branches, particularly to their frequent refusal to permit local strikes, this, as will be seen, was to be equally typical of the "new" unions. In fact it is essentially characteristic of all unionism and the materials of the time and general experience suggest that this restraint was usually justified. Although repeated again and again by later writers, the judgment that the "old" unions had become lethargic seems in reality to have been based on the accusations of the "new" unionists, made at the time when "new unionism" arose. Despite the fact that they were so obviously partial and that the "new" men scarcely understood the "amalgamated" system, these accusations have been taken at their face value. It is probably far more significant that writing some years later and looking back upon the eighties, Willett admits "...it must not be supposed that the older unionism was not militant, or that it was a cowardly type of service, and impotent." (6)

[As another alleged instance of the timidity of the "old" unionists and of their supposed belief in the fundamental compatibility of interest between worker and employer, frequent emphasis has also been placed on their advocacy of conciliation and arbitration. Certainly they were always agreed that there should be approaches to the employers before a strike was begun, but no responsible union leader, "new" or "old," has ever questioned this principle. (As will be seen later, advocacy of arbitration was to become rather more characteristic of the "new" unions than the "old".) And on the other hand, Howell for one recognised that arbitration was a difficult method of settlement to arrange, needing very careful consideration by the workers in each separate case. (7) Moreover, far from arbitration implying any approval of the competitive system, one of its attractions for the workers was that it represented an attempt to introduce the element of justice into wage-fixing — it was partly an attempt to avoid the anarchy of competition.

Another characteristic of some of the "old" unions, particularly in coal-mining and the iron industry, that has similarly been used to illustrate their supposed

7. Conflicts, 459; Labour Legislation, etc. II, 440.

acceptance of capitalism was their adoption of "sliding scales", by which their wage rates were arranged to move upwards and downwards in correspondence with the price movements of their products. But here again closer examination shows that this interpretation is unjustified. For instance, both Alexander Macdonald, the "old unionist" architect of the Miners' National Union,⁽⁸⁾ and Howell disapproved of the scales. Howell wrote in 1878 that he thought it better to make ^{moral} "normal and social" considerations the basis for bargaining over wage rates.⁽⁹⁾ The employers themselves do not seem to have accepted the view that these devices represented a submission to the workings of the capitalist system; on the contrary, their own prosecuting attorney on the Royal Commission ^{on} of the Depression of Trade of 1886 argued that the scale was an attempt to mitigate the workings of capitalism, an artificial device that would interfere with the free movement of the Labour supply. He suggested to the representative of the Durham Coal Trade Association that the sliding scale

".....entirely abrogates the wholesome natural effect of scarcity of labour, or of the superabundance of labour upon the price....(and)....is likely greatly to injure the trade that adopts it by bringing about an artificial rate of wages in one way or the other".

8. Cole, op. cit., 12.

9. Conflicts, 463.

And the witness agreed. (10) In fact it is significant that the use of scales was prominent in the exporting industries -- it was the miners of the north-east who hewed coal for export who were their strongest adherents; it is one thing to advocate socialist practices when production is for home consumption, quite another to try to relate them to international competition. Socialist economic thought in Britain, which is so utterly dependent on export trade, has always had to struggle with this difficulty. The fact that the miners of the north-east recognised the conditions of international competition as being largely beyond their power to control need not mean that they embraced capitalism as a system. Far from following laissez-faire doctrines, they were attempting to distort the operations of the international competitive system to their own advantage and to claim a right to a fixed proportion of the proceeds of their labour. Certainly it was this same group of miners who were the staunchest Liberals within the Labour movement, and their position in an export trade, with the higher degree also of its community of interests between owners and workers, probably was a factor contributing to their allegiance to Liberalism. But the sliding scales as they saw them were

10. Royal Commission on the Depression of Trade and Industry, 1886, Evidence qq 12348, 12444-5.

far from being an individualist conception; the workers were not nearly as strictly logical as the Webbs, who placed this interpretation on them, although it was often convenient for their leaders to point to the scales for propaganda purposes as examples of the compatibility of workers' and employers' interests. And their support of the sliding scale system was very far from signifying that they had resigned themselves to a more or less passive acceptance of whatever the economy should give them.

The sliding scales were rather, in fact, another device to bring order into the economic anarchy, to avoid the distress of strikes, secure themselves against sudden arbitrary reductions, and introduce an impersonal element into wage-fixing. They eliminated the competitive bargaining process. Although very far from perfect, they did bring a degree of crude justice into wage determination until a better system could be obtained. If it is probably true, as suggested, that the fact that they hewed for export was important in keeping the Durham and Northumberland men in favour of the scales, it is at least equally true that the reason why the Miners' Federation of Great Britain discarded them was less their own propagandist explanation that they had become convinced of the greater justice of the system of a minimum living wage, with wages controlling prices instead of being controlled by them, than the

simple fact that under the scales wages were steadily falling with the fall in coal prices. Their^{own} explanation is a typical instance of the common trade unionist tendency to rush into unnecessary generalisation in order to justify an attitude. In any case, despite the socialist doctrine that was implicit in this piece of rationalisation, the Federation leaders, who came mainly from Yorkshire and the Midlands and whose men were working mainly for the domestic market, also remained staunch Liberals until many years later.

Another charge against the "old" unionists has been that they showed their acceptance of the individualist philosophy in their cherished "independence" -- their proud determination to stand on their^{own} feet and refusal to appeal to a "grandmotherly state" for protection. The political philosophy of the "old" unionists will be discussed more specifically in the following chapter, but this aspect, since it belongs equally to their industrial policy, needs to be briefly considered here. Although this emphasis upon reliance on their strength in industry became more prominent in the eighties, when it was first questioned as a principle, it was in fact, their avowed philosophy from the beginning. They held that only when a particular group of workers were too weak to protect themselves was legislative "interference" justified. But even in the

sixties and seventies this much-publicised principle was contradicted by a great deal of their practice. For instance, when they fought for the factory act system, ostensibly on behalf of the women and young textile workers, it was really a case of the male operatives hiding behind the skirts of the weaker sex. And in fact they asked so often for special legislation that the exceptions almost seem to swamp the general rule.

In the case of safety legislation for the miners it was the danger to life and limb that was the justification, and the appeal for the institution of checkweighmen was based on sheer common justice. Later, on similar grounds, a plea for reduction of hours was supported for the railway workers. But with these and other exceptions conceded, it is hard to see where the line could logically be drawn. Year after year the stationary engine-drivers demanded government certificates for all who followed this occupation, but although they based their arguments on the public danger of employing insufficiently trained men, it was patently clear that the agitation was conducted in their own interests. John Burns' claim that the 1890 Trades Union Congress marked a victory for the principle of collectivism has often been quoted, ^{in this connection} supported apparently by his demonstration that 45 of the 60 resolutions passed were requests for

"legislative interference" (11) but the proportion had always been quite as high or even higher --- 35 out of 42 in 1885. ^{Miners} Apart from the crucial vote on the eight hour question --- and the victory on that issue was won only through the support of the miners, who were staunch individualists by general principle, there was hardly one of these resolutions carried in 1890 that would not have been passed five or ten years earlier. And the greater number of the resolutions was due mainly to the far greater number of occupations represented.

It was on the eight-hour question, in fact, that the "old" leaders eventually made their stand for individualism. Their main argument was that if Parliament lowered hours by law it could legitimately legislate on wages as well. At first sight this might seem rather an arbitrary choice for a last rampart; but there was in reality a clear enough distinction. Eight hours were not essentially more just than nine, and would obviously represent a gain reasonably similar to higher wages, and not in any very real sense a protection from injustice. In fact, as will be seen, the agitation for eight hours was openly aimed at achieving higher wages and social gains. As it was obvious that Parliament would never

deliberately establish insanitary or obviously dangerous conditions, there was no imminent harm, though a certain amount of danger from the precedent, in their previous legislative reform. With some hesitation, the "old unionists" were prepared to support the railwaymen's plea for shorter hours on the good ground of public safety, but even in this case a reduction to eight hours was more than they could ask.

Moreover the "new unionists" themselves never reached the point --- and the unions have not reached it yet, even under a Labour government --- of desiring that wages in general be regulated by Parliament. A year or two later they were to ask for a legal minimum wage, but this could be justified even on "old unionist" principles.

Above all the question was one of tactics more than principle. Parliament was obviously hostile, and even if it were to become friendly within a reasonable number of years, which seemed most unlikely, could even a potentially friendly Parliament be entrusted with a precedent for limiting wages? There was considerable point in the "old unionist" argument, and nothing that was really reactionary from the trade unionist point of view. Moreover, Parliament was much less friendly in the seventies than at the end of the eighties. And certainly in the seventies' before the eight-hour law issue had arisen, the "old

unionists", far from defending the last rampart, were fighting the battle of reduced hours far in advance of public opinion, even although they kept the contest to the industrial field.

For the employers even argued in the seventies that the reduction of working-time to the nine-hour day that the craft workers were then striving for by industrial means was a serious breach with morality, incompatible with the laissez-faire capitalist order. It represented, they said, an attempt to make the machines serve mankind that was ethically wrong and bound to lead to disaster. In 1874 the Standard described it (with reference to the miners) as "the policy of raising the price of a prime necessary of life by artificial restraints on productionwhich threatens grievous injury topublic interests"⁽¹²⁾ Nevertheless the unionist leaders of that period were staunch supporters of the shorter hours movement, Howell stating that a reduction in working-time was preferable to an advance in wages, as it was likely to be a more permanent gain. Certainly they based their defence partly on the claim that they were merely following standard competitive practices: reducing their production when they considered the return they were receiving to be

12. Feb. 21, 1874; quoted in Capital and Labour, Feb. 25.

insufficient; but they also pointed to the great social benefits shorter hours would bring to the workers. (13) If they lagged behind the general movement of political-economic thought later, in the seventies at least they were probably further in advance of it than is generally realised.

One other charge against the "old" unionists has to be considered: their alleged exclusiveness. Certainly the "old" unions were confined to the skilled craft workers; but does this mean, as has often been asserted, that their members regarded themselves as superior to the unskilled, a higher social order, endeavouring to keep the labourer in his place? Although there is ground for this charge --- in many public houses there was an artisans' bar, into which no unskilled worker dared intrude --- their attitude was based much less upon class principle than is often supposed. It was more a matter of self-interest and expediency common to all unionism. In fact, as will be seen when the "new" unions are discussed, some of these bodies also adopted restrictive practices and denied that the conditions of the lowest grade of labourer were primarily their concern.

In the first place, resistance to encroachments of

the unskilled upon their fields of work was absolutely necessary if the artisans' unions were to have any real existence. They depended for practically all their influence upon the skill of their members as craftsmen and this fact had permeated the whole structure of "old" unionism. The fact that a man was a member of a union was a guarantee of his ability; admission was jealously guarded; to obtain entry, a tradesman had to be capable of earning the standard rate and to be worth it; any relaxation of this rule they rightly saw as a menace to their own bargaining position. Insistence on a strict apprenticeship was an all-important device to this end. And the rigid limitation of the number of apprentices that was enforced wherever possible was equally important and necessary. There was really no possible alternative. Even with the use of all these devices, the unions were rarely very powerful.

It was noticed previously --- in considering the debate over the sliding-scales --- that the unionists had a habit of discussing such questions in over-generalised terms. This same tendency also gave a false impression of their attitude to the unskilled, and in this connection its effect can be seen more clearly by first glancing at its operation in the similar sphere of the relations of the craft unions between

themselves. Not only was each trade as vigorous in fighting the members of another that attempted to enter what it claimed as its preserves as it was in resisting the unskilled, but the rival craftsmen had no difficulty in finding eternal principles of justice and pure unalienable right with which to back their case. The constant disputes between shipwrights and joiners over the woodwork to be done on the new ocean liners is only one example: the work was an entirely new field,—the result of the new practice of fitting out the ships with luxury accommodation; but both parties based their case on unsupported claims to prescriptive right. To an extraordinary degree, the craft unions refused to recognise these contests for what they were — the mere overlapping of conflicting interests, much better settled by reasonable mutual concession than by declamation and high-flown oratory. A good deal of the same tendency to rush needlessly to general principles seems to have confused their attitude towards the unskilled worker.

Nevertheless part of their lack of close sympathy with the labourers was really a result of individualist principles. They held to the doctrine, an offspring of the Liberal belief in economic anarchy, that the interests of the various unions must occasionally conflict, and that this was a virtue more than a fault. The efficiency of

the movement would be best served by allowing each union unfettered liberty to develop its own system of methods in working for its own interests. It was for this reason that, whenever suggestions were made that the Trades Union Congress should take a more closely organised form, they rejected them, arguing that the constitution of the labour movement should be loosely federal; closer union would mean compromise and thus loss. (14) After all, they conceived of their unions as being individuals writ large -- devices to make competition really free and effective within the economic system. They asked for the right to fight for themselves within that system on equal terms with other groups of interests, and were prepared, in theory, to give the same right, to any other group, such as the less skilled wage-earners for instance. If they hardly faced up to the difficulty that the very individualism that they saw as their safeguard and moral right was useless and less than justice to the unskilled, this was largely because they were unable to conceive of unionism in any other terms than their own.

This instance does appear to be one case in which the "old" unionists accepted the current capitalist beliefs. But it is going too far to see in the acceptance of individualist teachings in this form any general acceptance

of laissez-faire capitalism. After all, what was the purpose of unionism in attempting to make competition really effective? It was to give real bargaining

power to the worker -- to give him greater freedom ^{than}

The system itself accorded him, or the employer intended him to enjoy.
It was the motivation that was significant, whatever

the device for obtaining it. And the "old" union

leaders were certainly opposed to individualist doctrines at many other points. Unionism was an empirical

reaction to the economic system, conditioned of course by the system to a certain extent, but a reaction essentially of repulsion rather than acceptance. If

the "old" unionists appeared to adapt themselves to capitalism, this was merely because it was in their best immediate interests to do so: it was not through any design of theirs that capitalism placed them in a more favourable position than the rest of the working classes.

In resenting any suggestion that they regarded themselves as the aristocracy of the wage-earners ---

Robert Knight's assertion before the Royal Commission on Labour of 1893-4 that "the labourers (ought) to keep

their places" (15) seems very extreme and far from typical -- they at least showed they had a conscience on the question. Yet at the same time there was very real obstacle to their co-operation with the unskilled. To the "old" unionists unionism could never be anything else but their own "scientific" form of organisation, based on the friendly benefits, apprenticeship, and amalgamation. The "new unions" of the

15. Royal Commission on Labour, 1893-4, Group A, evidence Q. 20801. Whenever this charge of exclusiveness is made, The Boilermakers are usually cited as an example. Certainly their relations with their helpers seem to lend most substance to the charge. But apparently there was ground for this attitude; in the seventies and eighties platers' helpers were paid piece rates and, according to the Boilermakers used to rush plates away before the platers were able to complete them properly. "If a plater returned to protest they would boycott him by a refusal to work, ultimately driving him from the locality." Proving quite obdurate in negotiations, the helpers were eventually crushed by the use of blacklegs. (D.C. Cummings: A Historical Survey of the Boilermakers and Iron & Steel Shipbuilders' Society, 111-2). Holders-up were admitted to limited memberships of the union, as also were caulkers from 1874 at the option of branches, after a long debate on the effect this would have on the funds; it was thought they would be more liable to discharge in bad times. (Ibid, 86-8). Reference is also frequently made to the Boilermakers' custom of punishing their own members for inflicting unnecessary injuries on the employers as representing subservience; but the Union resented this interpretation, claiming that this practice, which dated back to 1842, was entirely in their own interests. (Ibid, 34).

to capitalism

nineties were indistinguishable to them from the primitive bodies of the fifties and sixties whose inferiority they had so clearly demonstrated. If in the nineties they seemed unable to see the futility of their reply to the unions that were agitating for the "legal" eight hour day that they should build up their organisation to such a strength that they would be able to obtain it for themselves by industrial action, this was really because they were unable to recognise any other legitimate form of unionism. They insisted upon putting the whole question in unmeaning terms of enthusiasm and devotion. Justifiably afraid of the repercussions upon themselves if the method# of legislative interference were adopted, they refused to see that the industrial position of the less skilled workers could never be as strong as theirs. But this does not mean that they were hostile to the ambitions of the unskilled. They ^{"new unions"} seemed weak, unwise and inevitably violent. On the various occasions when they refused membership of the Trades Councils to labourers' organisations, ^{"old unionists"} (16) they did no not ~~just~~ merely

16. One example is mentioned in the Minute Book of the ^{which is held in the Birdsgate Institute,} International Workingmen's Association, for about 1868; the London Trades Council refused to grant affiliation to the Excavators. As the Directors of the Institute refuse to permit note-taking from the Minute Book, no more exact reference can be given.

from snobbery, but because they thought these bodies so different from theirs in function that they could have little in common -- which was only too true. The question was one of fact rather than of principle or sentiment.

They regretted the fact that the unskilled worker was "unorganisable", by which they meant, that he would never be able to form unions based upon friendly benefits -- but they could see nothing they could do to remedy this. Howell once stated - but as mentioned above, some of the "new" unionists were to take up the same attitude, with less justification from the viewpoint of self-interest - that the problem of poverty was not their responsibility any more than of the rest of the community. ⁽¹⁷⁾ In practice, however, they did give it considerable attention. They argued, of course, as all privileged classes do, that they must guard their own favoured position carefully -- "levelling-down" (by admitting greater numbers to their own trades) would be harmful, they held, to the whole of the working class -- the solution could only be "levelling-up". But the only hope they could see of breaking the vicious cycle was rather remote:

"...in the first place, the spread of education will... fit them for work of a higher order... In the second place, mechanical improvements will produce a further division of labour and thereby afford a greater chance

(17) Howell: *Conflicts*, 365.

to the poorer classes for obtaining employment in those industries which are now partially closed to them." (17)

In other words, practically nothing could be done to help.

Additional weight seems to be given to some of the accusations of exclusiveness directed at the Junta ^{by} from their action in keeping the floor closely to themselves before the Royal Commission on Labour ^{of} 1869. In fact, a good deal of the general criticism of the "old unionism" seems to derive from this incident. Doubtless, as Postgate in particular charges (18), Applegate and the rest of the Junta were ruthless in the methods they adopted to counter the opposition of those unionists outside the ranks of the "amalgamateds" who disapproved of their policies, but here again they were probably justified. These less intellectual labour leaders, ^{limited} in vision and out of touch with the world of public affairs, did not see the strategical realities as clearly as they did. The end probably justified the Junta's means. For the climate of public opinion changed tremendously in the seventies, through the work of the Junta themselves.

Until then, it was generally believed that, since wages were fixed automatically and justly by the free movement of

18. The Builders' History, 184.

17a. *Ibid.*

the labour market, trade unions were not only futile, since they could not raise wage rates above their "natural" level for any length of time, but positively harmful, for they attempted to interfere with the free flow of labour in accordance with the beneficent forces of supply and demand. ("Natural" of course, meant something other to the employers than it did to the "old" unionists when they argued that all they sought was to make free competition effective; the employers claimed that competition was already free -- that individual workers actually had equal bargaining strength compared with their employers.) As "Capital and Labour" expressed it:

"It is a fallacy to speak of wages as being just or unjust. A particular price of bread or of shoes might with equal propriety be so designated. Such phrases as 'a fair day's wages for a fair day's work' and 'a reasonable division between employers and employed' are meaningless, for there exists no natural standard. Dearness and cheapness are only relative terms, and the conditions they represent are caused by scarcity or plenty."(19)

And again: "(Trade unions) endeavour to control the Labour market, and to stop the free action of the law of supply and demand."(20) Because of the surface resemblances of the unions to monopolies -- the chief bugbears of the Liberals

19. 1874, 99 (editorial, April 1st).

20. Ibid, 17.

in their endeavours to clear away all artificial restrictions surviving from the age of mercantilism,--the employers could make a show of unmasking a real evil when they fulminated against the "intolerable oppression both on workmen and employer that the one should be forbidden to offer work, and the other should be forbidden to take it if he is not a member of a union, or if he does not agree to artificial terms." (21) Public opinion simply did not recognise that Labour had no effective bargaining power in the market unless the workers combined. Moreover, when the employers could seize upon examples of union practices such as the Sheffield outrages, which revealed that unionists had thrown bombs down the chimneys of workers refusing to join their ranks, the moral seemed to be clinched; not only did unionists try to draw false advantages from the economic system at the expense of the community --- they backed their anti-social practice with what seemed its logical conclusion; physical, criminal violence. No wonder "Capital and Labour" could call for the continuance of "exceptional legislation" for the protection of employers' property. (22) No wonder the "Daily News" -- according to Howell, by no

21. Ibid, 18.

22. Ibid, 18.

means the most bitter in its attacks - could win approval when it declared: "The unions must be stamped out". (23)

No wonder that before the Royal Commission that arose from the Sheffield outrages Applegarth and his colleagues spared no pains to show how limited were their aims, and how respectable their methods. Even so they had to challenge the whole generally-held explanation of the best working of the economy, pointing to realities beneath the surface, if they were to justify the industrial activity of unions at all. And they were reasonably straightforward in their evidence. When Applegarth stated that strikes practically never originated from the union executive, that union leaders regarded them as inferior methods of conducting disputes, and were concerned to prevent them, this as has been seen, was nothing less than the truth, and is nothing less in fact than the policy of all responsible unionists. But he did not admit that strikes were never justifiable, and resisted any suggestion that picketing was evil, or inevitably tended to become criminal. He surrendered practically nothing.

When one turns from this background to a consideration of the body of unionists outside the "amalgamateds", the

point of the Junta's machinations in excluding them is seen in rather a favourable light. Though not a quarter as bad as "Capital and Labour" painted them, many of the old-type leaders ("old" in the 1870 sense) might have done unionism little credit at that moment in the eyes of the general public. If honest and commendably robust and full of fighting spirit, they were rather primitive in their methods: if a member had ever suggested at one of their annual meetings that it might be as well to have the union accounts audited, the treasurer's immediate response would have been to punch his head. Brawn rather than tact was apparently the pre-requisite for the chairmanship of one of these rather turbulent bodies. (24) These "old" unions were, in fact, survivals from the years of Chartism when the workers had lived almost as beasts, and require no apology. But their day was past. With the raising of the standard of life of the whole community as the new productive efficiency began to have its effect in the cheapening of goods, and the gradual spread of education, a higher, more restrained and much more effective type of self-respect was becoming possible and necessary for unionism. Inevitably, of course,

24. See especially Postgate, *op.cit.* 196;
also S. Mecoby: *English Radicalism, 1853-86*, 112.

it came first among the more highly skilled artisans. The concept of the "amalgamated" type of unionism was very closely bound up with this new idea of respectability, more especially because the new complex nationally-co-ordinated methods required legal sanction for their successful operation. Applegarth's first battle over union policy, fought when he was still an obscure member of a Sheffield branch of Carpenters, was to stop the holding of meetings in a public-house---and his opponents showed their tons by abusing him as a "whipper-snapper who couldn't drink a glass of beer if he tried" (25). (By the 1890's, when clean linen was more common and this emphasis had developed and hardened into the top hat and pomposity of the Trades Union Congress "front bench" of that day, there was very different ground for resenting it).

The contest between the Junta and the rest of the unionists for the floor of the Royal Commission does seem to have been almost solely the result of the Junta's fear that the others would be less presentable and less accomplished in the art of answering hostile questions. After all, the presentation of the case was going to be a most difficult and

delicate task, calling for the highest qualities of diplomacy; a certain careful stress had to be made, in the face of hostility backed by acute legal minds. Although Cole suggests a suspicion on the part of the other leaders that the Junta's advocacy might "result in legislation which, even if it met their (the Junta's) special needs, would by no means satisfy the main bodies of mining and factory workers" (26) there seems to be little trace of this attitude. On the other hand, in fact, the committee elected by the 1867 conference of these unions stated in an address to its rank and file that the dispute with the Junta was "formal and personal only", that the attitudes of the two parties on questions of unionism were "exactly alike, (but)...some thought one set of men the most fit (to represent the trade union movement before the Royal Commission), and others thought otherwise". The Committee had tried to come to an understanding with the Junta and had failed, but had found "that the objections were wholly and solely party and personal; and that these, so far as the Committee could find out, are, if true, really frivolous, unworthy and unimportant". In its general attitude, this committee seems to have been

quite as moderate as the "amalgamated" leaders. The address stated: "The objects of unions of the operative classes we believe to be, first, beneficial to the artisans directly; to the employers, secondly; and to the public weal as a consequence." (27) Nor, apparently, did it have any fault to find later with the Junta's handling of the case for unionism. If there was any difference in policy, it seems to have been based on the preference of the older bodies for having nothing to do with legislation at all. But apart from the fact that this was a mistaken judgment, it is of course half contradicted by their very desire to come before the Commission. In fact such a policy had become almost impossible. The Junta were justified in their ruthlessness because their analysis was correct and they knew the future of unionism was in their hands.

And when the Criminal Law Amendment Act was passed in 1871, the two parties joined forces to fight it without any apparent difficulty, the Junta being quite as alarmed as the rest of the unions with its effect in making striking virtually impracticable.

27. Report of the Trades Conference held at St. Martin's Hall, London, March 5-8th 1867, 29-32, See also discussion in Chapter 3 for the policies of this group.

The distinction remains; the "old" unionists were skilled craftsmen, the "new" not more than partially skilled, and inevitably there was a difference in interests and methods, which was often generalised into a philosophy. But But this difference is often exaggerated, and in so far as principle and expediency can be separated, it probably had its origins much less in conflicting principles of political ^{and} economic thought than one would suppose from reading many of the workers' utterances.

Turning now to the pattern of organisation, one finds ~~that~~ it is also frequently asserted that the highly centralised "amalgamated" form of organisation associated with the model unions of skilled craftsmen, particularly the engineers and the carpenters and joiners, was connected more or less closely with their ^{apparently} non-militant industrial policy. Although meant primarily to secure greater efficiency in the administration of their benefits, it certainly did also enable the executive to keep a more effective check upon aggressive branches, but this was largely an accidental convenience. Later experience of the "industrial union" organisation favoured by the American I.W.W. shows that this same form of structure can be ideal for militant purposes too; after all, discipline is the first essential of a military striking

force, as also is the need not to squander fighting resources. In fact Cole points out that in the late sixties Macdonald's National Union of Miners insisted upon a loose federal organisation as the instrument of a restrained industrial policy, while their rivals, the Amalgamated Association of Miners, broke from them in 1869 on this very ground, precisely because they wanted amalgamation for militant purposes. (28).

It is a clear case of the exact opposite to the assumed general rule being true. (Again, if the General Secretaries of some of the larger unions became so mowed under with all the paper work that was one result of the complex "amalgamated" organisation, that they were unable to frame a coherent policy, and tended to resent any militant action because it upset the routine and added to their burden, this was a mechanical defeat and not a matter of principle. When realised, it could be and often was remedied by the appointment of salaried district organisers. In fact the charges of lethargy and reaction that were made against the "old" unions in the late eighties and early nineties were grossly exaggerated. There was a certain element of truth in them, more especially by that later time when many of their leaders ^{had become} cautious, habitually but their attitude was certainly never

as simple as it is often represented. And in the seventies at any rate, far from meekly bowing the neck to the official liberal-capitalism of the day, they fought strenuously against the current orthodoxy, which showed a hostility to unionism almost beyond the conception of the "new" unionists of the nineties. The fact that they were infected with some of the individualism of the time does not greatly detract from this judgment. They should be judged, not against the climate of thought that their victory created, but against the background of the accepted teaching in their own day. And this point is even more distinctly established by a consideration of their political activities before the onset of the Great Depression.

CHAPTER II.

THE POLITICAL ACTIVITY OF THE "OLD" UNIONISTS
IN THE SIXTIES & SEVENTIES.

What part was played in the political life of the sixties and seventies by the Junta and their allies? What were their political beliefs? If they were Liberals, what were their relations with the employers who formed the mainstay of the Liberal Party? In this chapter the political activities of the "old" unionists in their hey-day will be considered, with particular reference to these questions. The method adopted will be firstly to attempt a brief sketch of the characteristics of the individual members of the Junta, particularly of Applegarth, who did most to form their policies, then to consider the attitudes taken up by the group in the political life of the time.

Most prominent among the five trade union leaders who formed the Junta, though hardly as a spokesman, was possibly William Allan, the Secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers who had made that body the model of the "amalgamated" unionism. Laboriously diligent, cautious, bureaucratic, rather too sober in his judgment, Allan seemed for instance to believe that arbitration was a sacred principle. During a strike of the Staffordshire iron puddlers in 1865, for

*if this is so,
why question
much from
Howells which
would would
... is objection?*

instance, although the men had reason at least to be wary of an offer by Lord Litchfield to mediate between them and their employer, he told them that "nothing astounded him more than to hear any trade unionist repudiate arbitration."⁽¹⁾ Nevertheless, and despite the fact that he was not the type to make a platform politician, Allan, as will be seen, led the way into participation in politics. His virtues were naturally attractive to Guile of the Ironfounders, bluff, honest and motivated by rugged commonsense, and Coulson of the London Bricklayers, an able administrator, but "stolid and obstinate", "bricky and stodgy".⁽²⁾ Nor, apparently, did the sobriety of these colleagues repel Odger, the orator of the "amalgamated" unionism and the idol of the London Radical Workers, whose talents were very different. Like others gifted with flowing speech, Odger lacked organising ability and perserverence.⁽³⁾ ^{And} But for all his power of oratory there is no trace that ~~bestowed~~ ^{he possessed} any marked originality as a thinker. He was more of a follower and less of a leader than he

-
1. "Mr. Potter and the London Trades Council"; pamphlet in Howell papers.
 2. Webbs; History, 237.
 3. *ibid.*, 238; also "George Odger and His Times"; clipping in Howell papers.

appeared.

However, few would have followed Allan so far in his veneration for arbitration; as has been seen, Howell, the "Junta's" chief apologist and himself a man of ability but not imagination, recognised that this device had its difficulties (4). Carrying "amalgamated" principles to extremes, Allan was hardly typical of the movement. Applegarth, who was probably the source of its policies, particularly in the crucial year of 1869, more even than Allan; Postgate calls him "the main inspiration of ^{the} Junta" (5) ~~He~~ was a man of different fibre. Much more flexible in his views, he unquestionably had visions of an industrial world functioning in the interests of the workers that was remote from the capitalism of his day. But, justifiably, he kept this idyll fairly much to himself. It would have done more harm than good to publicise it. At that time the pressing of moderate demands was the only possible tactics; one can hardly quarrel with his judgment on this point; but as far as Applegarth was concerned it was probably tactics only, little more.

Considerable light is thrown on Applegarth's character by his association with the First International. Although

4. Conflicts, 459.

5. Postgate; Builders' History, 184.

Odger and Allan were largely responsible for the formation of this body in 1864, and practically all of the leading London unionists took part in its activities, they regarded it as merely a side-show in the campaign for the Reform Act of 1867, few paying it further attention after that date. And its doctrines at that time seemed fairly restrained. Although it was possible to give them a revolutionary interpretation, they were so vaguely phrased ^{that} and no Radical would have had any difficulty in giving them support; indeed Marx, who soon became the pamphleteer of the organisation carefully calculated the degree to which he would have to dilute his theories in order to retain the English leaders' adhesion. (6) Probably the Junta gave little thought to the implications of the statement, in the International's folder of rules, that:-

"the economical subjection of the man of labour to the monopoliser of the means of labour, that is the source of life, lies at the bottom of servitude in all its forms, of all social misery, mental degradation and political dependence." (7)

Certainly they took far more interest in other aspects of the International's activities. Howell's later statement that the International's teachings "might be expressed in

6. Marx-Engels: Selected Correspondence 1846-95 (trans. Dona Torr, 1936), 163.

7. In Howell papers.

the Comtist formula--Order and Progress" and that "Socialism, as now preached, was never taught" suggest that they paid little heed to questions of theory. He also asserted that "(although) the Eight Hours Day was one of our aspirations.... it was never even hinted that it was to be an Eight Hour Day by Act of Parliament" -- one could well retort that it was never even hinted either that it was not to be. Another of his remarks reads rather curiously beside Marx's published correspondence of that time:

"Dr. Karl Marx was one of the founders, and I can truly say that a more honourable, truthful and upright man it was never my good fortune to associate with. If anything, he was too unsuspecting (and was led astray by intriguers)". (8)

Nevertheless, although most of the Junta and their associates left the International soon after 1867, Applegarth stayed on and was still attending about one meeting in four in 1869, some time after it was really politic for him to do this. In fact he persisted in his membership even when the Times made capital of the fact, (9) In 1869 he attended the Basle Conference, and when taken to task by a Liberal supporter for voting in favour of the abolition of private

-
8. Howell; "Working-Class Movements of the Century" IV: clippings of series of articles from Reynold's Newspaper, in Howell papers.
9. Cole; Short History of the British Working Class Movement, 195.

property, actually commissioned Marx to write a justification for him (10).

At the meetings of the General Council he took part occasionally in the constant debates on social institutions, but without much distinction. Once, when alternative systems of landholding were being discussed, he showed a trace of more practical leanings than the rest of the circle by suggesting that it might be as well first to consider how to do away with the existing system of tenure. But on another occasion, in explaining the teachings of the International to an American journalist, he stated that "so long as society rests on its present false basis, every fresh development of the productive powers of Labour would only deepen social contrasts and sharpen social antagonisms." (11).

There is enough smoke in Applegarth's links with the International to hint at a noticeable amount of fire. At the very least, he was not altogether satisfied with the perfection or justice of the existing social-economic order. His interests were always wide, and within the A.S.C.F. he attempted, without ^{much} great success, to broaden the outlook of his members in order to develop and

10. Marx-Engels Correspondence, 277.

11. Minute Book of the International.

12. Howell papers: collection of clippings on the International, New York World, May 21st, 1870.

demonstrate their general attitude of responsibility. But the history of his association with Marx probably shows that there was more to this attempt to educate his union than a mere desire to make artisans into citizens. In day-to-day policy he showed more of the virtue he had in common with the rest of the Junta - but which was not always prominent among the "new" unionists of the 1890's - sober common-sense. But he apparently saw nothing in immediate moderation that was incompatible with a more advanced general philosophy.

It was unfortunate for the later reputation of the Junta that Applegarth disappeared so soon from the leadership of the Labour movement. (Resigning from the Carpenters & Joiners in 1871 mainly because of their disapproval of the time he spent on activities to remedy social problems, he became manager of a small business and lived on till 1925, but played no further part in unionism.) Allan, Guile, Odger and Coulson died before the battle was really resumed on new ground; but in any case they were not men of the type who could have readjusted their viewpoint. Howell, it was who remained on the scene, together with Broadhurst - a shallow man - and, though able and diligent, Howell lacked inspiration. His talent was to be the wire-puller of the group. In many respects he was probably the most typical of the "old" unionists, but he was so typical, so well grounded in the details of the "old unionist" philosophy,

that he always seemed to live in the seventies. If only it had been Applegarth who had stayed on to represent the "old" unionism in the nineties, it might well have borne a better appearance to posterity, for if Howell was typical of some aspects of the "old" movement, Applegarth was something more. Representing the Unionism of the seventies in its most enlightened aspect, he might well have enabled it to grow to meet the changed circumstances of the nineties without the bitterness that did occur.

Turning more directly now to consideration of the political activity of the "old" unionists, it must first be noted that, in addition to their work in connection with the Royal Commission and constant lobbying and other agitation concerning labour legislation, they were in fact very active in general politics throughout most of the sixties and seventies, largely but not altogether for the same purposes. This is despite the fact, given a misleading emphasis by some writers, that one of the principles of "old unionism" was supposed to be a refusal to be concerned with politics. Some writers, for instance, have drawn attention to Howell's ^{omission,} unionism from a list he drew up of the uses that could be made of trade union funds, of

any reference to political activity.

It is actually true that the rules of most unions forbade the discussion of political questions, but the position was a mass of contradiction. The whole question, in fact, was largely one of expediency, as is hinted by the decision of the Trades Union Congress of 1874 that it would be "unwise and undesirable to pledge itself to any course of action in respect to Labour representation in Parliament, and that each representative be at liberty to take what action he thinks proper in the town or city in which he resides." (13) Even George Potter's London Workingmen's Political Association decided ~~too~~ that "it would not be wise to turn unions into political organisations, but they might use their influence to obtain Labour representation...." (14) As the major consideration was always that the function of the unions was primarily industrial, it was held that direct participation as societies in political activity would tend to disrupt and thus weaken them on the industrial field. Since the same attitude was to be taken up in the twentieth century by the I.W.W.

-
13. Report of 1874 TUC, 30. But possibly the wording of this resolution is connected in some way with the Liberal defeat at the general election immediately following, which seems to have been partly due to the Labour vote. There is also a statement in Howell (Labour Legislation, etc. II, 335) that some resolutions proposed at this Congress were more strongly worded than the Junta wished, and so were voted down.
14. A.W. Humphrey: History of Labour Representation, 21, quoting the Beehive, Oct. 12, 1867.

syndicalists it is by no means a symptom of timidity. Where they were sufficiently united and determined on some question, they did take action.

The position is clarified a little by the fact that the unionists regarded specific trade union demands as being outside the field of general and party politics. And when they did take up a question such as the extension of the franchise which did belong more definitely to this field, the Junta and their associates appealed to the unionists for support as individuals, but did not ask the unions to participate as unions.

Most of the leaders and a large proportion of the rank and file, for instance, did support the Reform League campaign leading up to the Reform Bill of 1867. In fact it was less the Junta than the older leaders who eschewed politics: Howell and Odger tried in vain to win over the London Trades Council ~~from~~ ^{after} 1861; but from about 1865, when the Junta began to dominate it, they were more successful. (15) And this is only consistent with the earlier statement that it was part of the Junta's policy to cultivate public opinion and exercise more influence in public affairs.

Moreover, despite the appeal to the workers as individuals instead of to the unions, as organisations, many unions did

15. C.F.Brand; British Labour's Rise to Power, 4-8; W.K.Lamb: British Labour and Parliament (unpublished thesis in the University of London), 48-9.

take an official part in the demonstration towards the close of the campaign. At first this was mainly in the north, being particularly noticeable in Birmingham, but after the 1866 failure a great number of societies openly joined the processions in all parts of the country. (16) Certainly, whatever their attitude in actual union meetings, the Junta were active in politics, did promote working-men candidates, and appealed to unionists for support. And far from there being any sign that they disapproved of the action of the miners' unions in running Alexander Macdonald and Thomas Burt in 1874 and supporting them while in the House, there is ample evidence that they heartily approved.

By the latter part of the eighties, it had become an "old unionist" doctrine that it was best for individual unions to obtain their own separate parliamentary representation. Although there are indications that this was partly an application to the political field of the individualist doctrines already noticed as accepted for industrial purposes (the belief that each union should be allowed the utmost freedom to develop along its own lines), it was probably even more a matter of expediency, the separate unions being thought the best unit for raising the necessary funds and organisation. In other words, trades should be represented rather than Labour as a class, and the benefits of Labour representation

would be gained incidentally. But there seems to be little trace of this doctrine in the seventies: the Junta appealed to the Labour interest as a whole.

As has already been stated, the Junta were first active in politics in the sixties, being very prominent in the Reform League, which did more than any other body to obtain the vote for the urban workers in 1867. In fact the League was really formed by the unionists. Although it was first sponsored by a Liberal group who sought the support of the Labour movement, the working-class section insisted upon manhood suffrage as the aim, whereupon half the Liberals ~~who~~ would go no further than household suffrage ^{and} left to form the National Reform Union under Bright at Manchester. The League was very disappointed at Russell's 1866 bill, but did support it, purely on grounds of expediency. (17) In fact the League faced peculiar difficulties which made it impossible for it to pursue a really independent course and helped to create dissension within its ranks which greatly hastened its disintegration. Practically the whole of its funds came from or through Morley under a secret agreement known only to Howell, Cremer and Beales. This provided that they must not be used to oppose a Liberal candidate. Thus, to their great indignation,

17. Brand, 14-15.

even Bradlaugh, though a Vice-President, and Potter, were unable to obtain monetary help; and the League was forced to lend itself to many causes, such as Irish disestablishment, that were of little interest to the workers. (18).

Nevertheless, the League did put up some show at least of independence and the quarrels over the funds are one indication of a more ambitious spirit among its members. Howell and Cromer themselves, without aid from the fund, actually contested double-member seats where they disapproved of compacts to return a Whig and a Tory. And Howell for one showed unmistakable spirit. In the League's Hyde Park demonstrations of 1866 and 1867. On the first occasion, when the Government forbade entry to the Park, he was apparently fortunate to escape without injury. According to his own later account (19) he stayed in the front ranks of the crowd that burst through the Park railings while the leaders of the demonstration departed to a protest meeting in Trafalgar Square; the police began to baton the heads of the demonstrators, and troops which had been standing by in readiness were called up. But Howell heard their commanding officer exclaim to the police: "You damned brutes, why beat a man to death on the ground?" and lead his men away. In the following year, despite the pleading of many friends who feared for his life, Howell was

18. Lamb, 168-185.

19. Howell; People Whom I have Met, I (Series of newspaper articles in Howell papers).

determined to head a second forbidden descent on the Park, when at the last moment the prohibition was withdrawn. Perhaps if he had suffered injury or imprisonment he would have been given a place in working-class legend nearer to Cunningham-Graham and John Burns.

Once the franchise had been extended, the "amalgamated" leaders took less interest in political organisations for a time, giving most of their attention from 1867 to 1869 to the questions raised by the Sheffield outrages. It was in these years, however, that the London Workingman's Political Association, the body mentioned above and led by George Potter of the "Beehive", had its brief existence. It had been formed in 1866, before enmity had come to a head among the London leaders, as the result of a resolution proposed at a public meeting by Gulle, himself a member of the Junta. (20 And although Potter had become the Junta's chief rival by 1867, Howell, Odger and Cromer, together with Broadhurst -- then a minor figure, continued to take part in its activities, all three contesting the general election of 1869 as Association candidates, although not directly under its auspices as it was incapable of running candidates on its own behalf.

The Association was the first labour body to suggest that working-men be run as candidates for Parliament. Yet,

20. Humphrey, 11. *Potter had, however, clashed with the Junta previously, taking the side of the Sheffield iron-workers, for instance, in 1865.*

although Cole suggests that a noticeable measure of a spirit of independence from the Liberals may have had something to do with its failure, it was very moderate in attitude. In his own words, Potter himself claimed to be an "ardent Liberal". (21) Most of its 1867 manifesto consisted of an attempt to rebutt the charge of fostering "class representation":

"We believe that, after the first novelty of their appearance in the House has worn off, they (Labour members) will, insensibly and imperceptibly, blend with the other members in the performance of the usual duties expected from members of the Legislature We presume that the working-class candidate, in addressing a constituency, would do as all other candidates do -- appeal to the electors generally, and not to those of a particular interest."

At that time, however, even the mere suggestion of Labour representation was in itself enough to arouse the ire of the Liberals. And in the further statement that

"redress of grievances and greater justice was all that was asked for; and that the aim of the representation of Labour was to harmonise the interests of working-men with those of the rest of the community,"

the hint of injustice probably suggested a troublesome independence of spirit. It was coupled, moreover, with the retort that, although they were not asking for

"exceptional legislation, did we (do so) we should be asking nothing more than all interests, now represented in Parliament, are always asking and often obtaining,"

which was true enough to show an unmistakable tinge of

impertinence! In the temper of the times, such outspokenness was insufficiently subservient in attitude. (22)

Twice as an Association candidate Odger withdrew from a contest in favour of a Liberal; but there were other campaigns when the Liberals were opposed. (23) And the reason for the Association's apparent lack of vigour on occasions when its nominees stood down was its chronic weakness rather than any fear of "splitting the progressive vote". Forever short of funds, it appears never to have numbered many more than six hundred members. Three conferences which it summoned at various times all seem to have failed to meet. (24)

In November 1869 the Association gave place to the Labour Representation League, which was practically an instrument of the Junta--their most direct political device in the campaign for the legal protection of unionism. In its general objects, "the harmonising of working-men's interests with those of the general community.....not the promulgation of utopian theories, or the pursuit of treacherous phantoms" (25) it seemed even a shade more moderate than its predecessor, though it was impossible to be much more restrained. It took the utmost care to avoid

22. Manifesto in Howell collection.

23. Humphrey, 23-32.

24. Ibid, 34.

25. Ibid, 39-40.

suggestion of "class politics", but the difference is so slight as to be hardly perceptible, amounting mainly to greater discretion in phrasing--the diplomacy of the Junta in another sphere, seemingly less honest than before the Royal Commission. Its programmes appear to be little more than Radical. In Howell's platform, in a Norwich by-election contest in 1870, which he entered as a League candidate but from which he had to withdraw, the main items were state education, the regulation of mining, the employment of idle labour upon the land, the reform of the Land Laws, and the reorganisation of the army, which he claimed was over-expensive and inefficient, (26) This seems to be typical. The third item, which seems the most "advanced", probably goes no further than the more extreme Radicals would favour, but is certainly beyond the bounds of current orthodoxy.

Odger was a candidate of the League several times at by-elections, and for the 1874 general election it brought forward no fewer than fourteen men, including the successful miners' representatives, Burt and Macdonald, ^{and} also Howell, Potter, Kane, Odger, Cremer and Broadhurst. Macdonald in particular soon won a reputation for sturdy independence in the House; in 1879 he ^{declared} ~~discharged~~ himself reasonably satisfied with the Conservatives, and "not desirous of rushing into the arms of Liberalism." (27) After 1875, when its main

26. Ibid, 39-40.

27. Lamb, 335, quoting the Staffordshire Sentinel, Jan, 18, 1879.

d'être had gone with the passing of the Trade Union Act, the League seems to have passed out of active existence.

Although Broadhurst was still claiming to be its Secretary in 1881, it seems to have disappeared from public view in the summer of 1878. (28) By that time the union leaders had merged themselves almost completely into the Liberal Party. As the Liberals were ready after their 1875 defeat to accept an occasional working-man candidate, Broadhurst entered the House in 1880 as a Party member. (29) There were few Labour candidates that year; Broadhurst, Burt, Macdonald, Arth and Lucraft.

In setting up the Labour Representation League and formulating its policies, the Junta acted quite consistently with their attitude in the industrial sphere. As Liberals, they sought at first only to urge working-men candidatures within Liberal Party branches. (30) They asked, as they did within the economy, only for equality of treatment with other interests, apparently believing, in the best Liberal tradition, that they would only have to explain their point of view in Parliament for their case to be given fair treatment. But they held that no-one from another class could explain it adequately for them. If their manifestors

28. Ibid, 373.

29. Humphrey, 52, 86.

30. See particularly Cole: Short History of the British Working Class Movement, 211.

can be taken at face value, they regarded Parliament as an instrument not of power politics, where decisions were reached by counting the heads of interested parties, but of the reconciliation of conflicting interests by reasoned compromise. Thus they thought that a mere handful of Labour spokesmen in the Commons would be enough. (31) On entry into the House, Burt thought the middle-class there "fail in their efforts from want of special knowledge, and are unjust rather from want of sympathy (i.e. understanding of the workers' viewpoint) than from the absence of a desire to do right." (32)

Disillusionment was to come later, after the theory had been tried in practice. It is a little harsh, perhaps to blame the Junta for this over-optimism in the seventies, before the experiment had been carried out, though certainly their experience of politicians should have taught them better. They would probably have spoken in different terms in any case if there had been any prospect of getting more than a handful of Labour men into the House. (33) (Quite a different judgment, of course, should be applied to Howell for still insisting in the 1890's that "a few men" in the

31. This idea is met with very frequently at this time. See particularly L.W.M.A. manifesto quoted above (ref.22).

32. A. Watson: A Great Labour Leader (biography of Burt), 162.

33. Some at least saw that a handful of Members would not be enough, and one Beehive correspondent asserted Labour's right to a majority of the House (Lamb, 234-6).

Commons could obtain all that the workers needed. (34)

Probably the most significant aspect of the League's history, ^{in fact} is the treatment accorded it by the Liberals. Radicalism itself found little favour among the official Liberals at this time; and the party system was still loose enough to enable a large number of Radicals to stand in opposition to Liberal candidates. In fact by about 1874 the Liberals and Radicals were almost separate parties. The Whigs were preferred to vote with the Tories on a large number of measures; there were many who favoured settling-up two distinct organisations; just before his selection as Liberal leader Harrington himself actually suggested separate leaders for Liberals and Radicals, on the ground that "I think that there is hardly any important question on which the Whigs and Radicals will not vote against each other", illustrating the point with a long list of examples. (35) It was thus, after their nominees had been persistently rejected by the Party branches, that the League began to run them independently with the support of a few of the Radical wing, such as Dilke and Hoare. Even so, there were many other Radicals - Bright in a notable instance - who looked upon them with disfavour; and certainly the Party still would not concede them an inch. (36)

34. Labour Legislation, etc., II, 492.

35. S. Macoby, English Radicalism 1853-86, 194-5, 204.

36. See particularly Humphrey, 61, also Walton's paper at 1873 F.V.C. At the 1874 Congress (p27), Broadhurst warned the delegates of the "Fury" with which the "middle-class, or capitalists", would oppose their efforts to obtain representation.

Only in the cases of Burt and Macdonald in 1874 were their candidates not opposed by official Liberals, and in Burt's case at least the unionists were so strong in the electorate which was composed almost entirely of miners, that the Party had no option but to give way. Burt was returned by 3,332 votes to 585 (37). In short, and similarly again to the situation in the field of industry, the Junta, despite their extreme moderation, were asking for more than would be granted. The mere conception of returning working-men to Parliament was too "advanced" -- almost revolutionary in that day. After all, Labour questions formed only a small part of parliamentary activity - why should the workers be considered on such matters as the opening of the universities and the reform of the army? Although they were obviously prepared to vote as good Liberals on almost every question, and despite all their specific denials of "class interest", the Liberal hierarchy, particularly Bright, continued to castigate them for seeking "class representation". (26) The Liberal leaders were right, of course, in their judgment: the League's very existence contradicted its own disclaimers. And this is a point that seems to have been overlooked by many later writers.

37.

26. Bright's attitude is well known, but see particularly letter to Broadhurst, March 21, 1875, in Broadhurst correspondence at British Library of Political Science.

Apart from satisfactory trade union legislation and regulation of mining and similar gains, was there anything more that the "old" unionists hoped to obtain from their entry into politics in the seventies? Was their political philosophy only Liberal? Applegarth's interest in the possibility of reforming the whole social order by altering the pattern of its economic basis, although significant, hardly entered of course into practical politics. But contemporaries did claim to see a deeper significance in their ambitions. In 1872 Fawcett believed that among the working class there was a

"deep distrust in the fundamental principles on which society is based. A widespread sentiment has grown up that it is no use relying upon the old remedies and the old nostrums. Resort must be had to far more radical changes; the foundations on which our social system rests must be altered." (39)

Mill held the same opinion:

"the principal of private property is undermined in the opinion of the working classes. (If the working classes obtain power) the laws of property (would) have to depend for support upon considerations of a public nature, upon the estimate made of their conduciveness to the general welfare, and not upon motives of a more personal character operating on the mind of those who have control over government." (40)

This conclusion does in fact seem to be supported by various statements even of the more conservative unionists: for instance the monthly report of the Boilermakers for

39. Essays and Lectures, 3-8.

40. Fortnightly Review, Jan. 1879 (written about 1870.)

April 1869 pointed to the annual total of a hundred and fifty million pounds of profits and interest;

"while thousands of these labourers who produce it are in a state of destitutions and starvation, this enormous sum is pocketed by the capitalists, who seek to oppress you by laws of oppression against labour."

And it has been confirmed by later research. The Webbs declared:

"No reader of the working-class literature for the last two hundred years can, however, doubt the existence of an abiding faith in...another principle. Deep down in their hearts the organised workmen, even whilst holding the doctrine of Vested Interest, or acquiescing in that of Supply and Demand, have always cherished a feeling that one condition is paramount over all, namely, that wages must be so fixed that the existing generation of operatives should at any rate be able to live by their trade."

Similarly they believed that -

"the average trade unionist unconsciously takes it for granted that the hours of labour, whether fixed by Collective Bargaining or Legal Enactment, ought to be settled without reference to the momentary strategic position of the section concerned". (41)

A modern student is even more specific:

"The student of the moderate political movement, which flourished in the late sixties and early seventies, cannot but be struck by the presence of a substratum of advanced ideas, which lay beneath, and upon occasion broke through, its severely practical surface. (Its leaders did not think the Chartist aims wrong so much as injudiciously expressed.) Labour has not so much altered its conception of economic and social justice as developed a conviction as to its practical applicability. (These early leaders) bequeathed... the conviction that the possession of political power,

by the working-class, was both a right to which it was entitled and an essential preliminary to any thoroughgoing social and economic reform....it was upon these very grounds that the cautious leaders of the sixties urged the necessity for the renewal of vigorous working-class political activity...wide differences in tactics, (i.e. at different periods) and even in declared objectives, were often no more than reactions to temporary circumstances, or concessions to political expediency." (42)

Frequently in the seventies Labour politicians overstepped the bounds of Liberal or Radical orthodoxy. For instance George Holyoake's platform when he contested Tower Hamlets in 1857 included the foundations of "Home Colonies" on the waste lands of the Crown "which would eventually extinguish pauperism" -- a proposal that became quite common in following years (43) and he also declared, in reply to the suggestion that "the working-class would *had no reasonable measure to propose which the middle-class would not pass*" -- which he denied -- that, even if it were true, "it is better that the workmen should do it for themselves." (44)

Similarly, ^{in it} the 1867 programme, of the London Workingmen's Association called for legal reduction of the hours of labour. (45) When Howell stood in the by-election at Norwich in 1870, a League manifesto in his support stated that they were asking only for "a mere instalment of a fuller justice that will have, at no distant date, to be conceded." (46)

42. Lamb, 6-8.

43. Humphrey 4-5, for a further example see Howell's Norwich platform previously discussed (reference 26).

44. Humphrey, frontispiece.

45. Ibid, 20.

46. Ibid, 40.

As a candidate for the Birmingham School Board in 1875, even such a moderate as W.J.Davis, the Brassworkers' secretary refused Liberal aid and preferred to run purely as a Labour representative, being opposed by the Liberals as a result.

(He became prominent in Liberal Associations later). (47)

At the 1869 TUC Odger declared it the "bounden duty" of the government to do something for those out of work. (48) And later at the same Congress it was resolved that "nothing short of co-operative production applied to manufacturing and land can be accepted as a cure for the conflicting interests of capital and labour", (49) while a member of the Labour Representation League executive read a paper in which he called the two political parties "equal enemies of the people" and advocated a national paper currency based on the national credit. (50)

It is surprising too to discover the very definite economic benefits the union leaders expected to obtain from the electoral measures they were advocating. Although they were extremely vague about the actual means that would supply these benefits, they were quite clear as to the results themselves. For instance there is Howell's address at

47. W.A.Dalley: Life Story of W.J.Davis, 47-54.

48. 1869 TUC report, 23.

49. Ibid., 27-8

50. Ibid., 32.

Norwich, which blithely advocated

"the extension of material wealth so as to secure the participation of all in the general prosperity of the country without prejudice to any interest and without injury to any class." (51)

C.F.Brand gives several long quotations, most of them more specific than this. Two are claims that obtaining the vote would mean an end to industrial disputes; for example Odger stated that "if the working-class had political enfranchisement such a lock-out as that (in the iron-trade) now disgracing the country would not have occurred." (Surely this was going far beyond independence of grandmotherly legislation.) On another occasion Odger made a very comprehensive claim:

"We have been asked what we shall gain by it (the vote) when we get it. Our answer is a plain one: the working-men's daughters shall not be driven into the close garret or unwholesome workshop, there to labour 14 to 16 hours a day, sometimes all night, for a poor and beggarly subsistence. They should go forth and see nature, they should have leisure hours to acquire those attributes which would help to make them intelligent and useful wives. Poor boys should receive a better education and not be thrust into the mines before they were strong enough for the work. The poor agricultural labourer should not be compelled to work and maintain his family upon 8 shillings a week, nor yet sent to gaol for taking a bit of old wood to kindle a fire to warm a sick wife.....The machine....should become a blessing to mankind as it was intended; and not be used to drive families upon the world to live or starve as the case may be. A change in the law should not starve hundreds of ribbon weavers, nor cotton panies make the industrious worker a pauper or a dependent upon charity; these things and a great many more should

be done away with. The working-man with the vote would feel himself free and independent; self-reliance, that noble, soul-animating quality, would fully develop itself to the benefit of the whole of the community." (52)

Nevertheless, for all these half-instantive stirrings of revolt, the unionists remained Liberals in the general outlines of their political philosophy in the sixties and seventies. Nonconformists almost to a man, they were driven away from the advanced radicals with whom they might otherwise have allied by Bradlaugh's insistence ^{upon} of coupling his radicalism with free-thought. In any case Bradlaugh was an extreme individualist, far removed from the line of their natural tendencies. There was also the all-important need for keeping up their reputation for respectability -- which association with free-thought and republicanism would immediately have destroyed -- until the trade union acts were rectified. On one occasion Applegarth went so far as to persuade the Labour Representation League to censure some

52. British Labour's Rise to Power, 9-12. Several ^{of these passages} show an interesting use of the word "social" -- as in "social advancement"; obviously equivalent to "economic advancement". The term "economic" was not yet in use -- Marx employed "economical" in this sense in his statement of the International's objectives; as in the phrase previously quoted -- "the economical subjection of the man of labour." ("Economics", of course, was still "Political Economy" at this time.) Realisation that "social" was often used in the attempt to fill this gap makes possible a different interpretation of many utterances of this period.

attacks on the Royal Family by Bradlaugh's following on the ground that the question of the monarchy was a mere side-issue to the workers. He probably showed notable presence in this! "Republicans were rarely to prove good friends of the Labour movement." (53)

But the main reason for the general loyalty of the trade unionists to Liberalism was that it was still the great progressive political force, its possibilities still apparently far from exhausted. The question of continuing under its inspiration became rather a different issue in the eighties when it had been given a further trial and its limitations, and the limits to the possibilities of working within the Liberal party, had been much more clearly revealed. For the moment, moreover, Liberalism had no real rival.

Although clearly significant and impressive to contemporaries, all the ambitions and vague empirical stirrings of discontent among the workers did not yet constitute even a rudimentary political philosophy. Although they were collectivists in practice, they could still think only in Liberal terms. Socialism had not yet become a complete, coherent body of doctrine. One can hardly blame Howell, for instance, for his refusal to give serious consideration to socialism when he saw it only in the form of the French "national workshops"

of 1848. (A different judgment can be made of his failure to look into the question more closely after socialist teachings had emerged in more challenging form in the early eighties.) And in any case the British Labour movement required its own form of socialism. Partly at least the deficiency was one of personality; as yet no working-class prophet had arisen capable of formulating a Labour philosophy - a Labour as opposed to a merely "intellectual" socialism.

One further point needs mention here. As has been stated, the "old" unionists were accepted Liberals in the eighties, although they formed the Liberal-Labour section within the Party and had political programmes of their own, drawn up by the Trade Union Congresses, in addition to the Party's policies. In discussing these programmes for the early 1880's, the Webbs, moved apparently by their zeal for collectivism, point to the inclusion of peasant proprietorship, worker-owned cottages, "self-governing" workshops and the multiplication of patents in the hands of workmen as "social reforms" which, in their opinion, were so tainted with individualist conceptions as to conflict seriously with the true interests of trade unionism. Thus they cite them as examples of "old unionist" timidity and conservatism. They argue too, making the same point from another aspect, that these measures would strike at the roots of unionism itself as an institution. (54) Perhaps this is true from the viewpoint

of a Fabian collectivist of the 1890's; but few men, few trade unionists particularly, could ever govern themselves by logic as wholly as Sydney Webb. Looked at in another light, the light in which the workers saw them, these suggested reforms were surely examples of a sentiment of revolt against the economic system as it was then operating. They were attempts to make a human being out of a worker, instead of a mere unit in the labour market, a cog in the industrial machine. Their individualism is of little significance. The individualism of capitalism was wage-slavery to the workers; to them this was a different individualism, and quite a different conception. Socialism to the workers was essentially another form of individualism, and these objectives represented an attempt to obtain socialism by a different route than collectivism. Except from the viewpoint of tactics, the workers have never cared to distinguish between the various types of socialism - between collectivism or phalanxes or communes for instance. It was the objective of common ownership that was significant, not the form of organisation. Similarly, although co-operative production, which was always warmly ^{supported} ~~provided~~ by the "old" unionists, can in theory be regarded as an attempt on the part of the workers to become small-scale capitalists for themselves, this has no significance as far as their motives are concerned. They saw the *project* as a method

of superseding capitalism. Nor did unionists uphold trade unions as ends in themselves, but rather as means of rising above the inhumanity of the system that made them necessary.

Far from representing subserviance to capitalist ideologies, these objectives of the early eighties are surely to be viewed, moderate though they may be, as symptoms of a refusal to bow to laissez-faire industrialism that was typical of "old unionism". If, typically in this respect too, they were bound to be quite ineffective in practice, this is very largely a different point.

The true measure, in fact, of the relation between the Liberals and the "old unionists" in the seventies, is revealed in the struggle of 1870-5 over the ^{al}legislation of unionism. For despite all their moderation and caution -- and this shows how very necessary it had been, -- the Junta did not win Parliament over to their point of view before the Royal Commission of 1869. Only by dint of strenuously continued pressure did they manage to gain even a partial victory in 1871, when the Liberals conceded the legal recognition of unions by the Trades Union Act of that year. (55) But this was coupled with the Criminal Law Amendment Act which made strike-action virtually impossible, and only by pressing all

55. The following treatment of the 1869-75 struggle over the Labour laws is based mainly on Howell; Labour Legislation, etc. One indication of the amount of resistance the unions had to face is the space Howell gives to this contest: fourteen chapters, IX-XXXIII.

their efforts were the Junta able to have the two measures separated. As Cole expresses it, Gladstone had taken their professions "au pied de la lettre"; their protests of peaceful intentions had been answered with compulsory unilateral disarmament. Public opinion and the press had not yet been convinced; and so the contest continued, with all unionists now working together. So far was the battle from being won that for four years the Liberals showed no sign of giving way - when appealed to, Gladstone was beginning to make a strategic retreat merely jocular (57) when they saw the 1874 general election coming upon them. And then, although the union leaders were still over-reluctant to disavow the traditional working-class allegiance to Liberalism they took the step of seeking pledges from candidates from both sides of the House. This action must have contributed a good deal to the Conservative victory. (58)

56. International Review for Social History II, 1937, 19.
 57. Howell; op cit. I, 216.
 58. This belief - that the discontent of the trade unionists played a large part in the Liberal defeat - is generally held by those who have written of this period. Ben Pickard, however, made a curious remark at the TUC of 1887 which suggests a different interpretation. In a debate on the question of independence in political activity, he stated that they had been "burnt that way" in 1874 (report, 28-30). But I can find no evidence to support this suggestion. As has been seen, there were 14 Labour candidates in 1874, of whom Burt and MacDonald were returned. Although not very satisfactory, this result compared rather well with previous efforts, and hardly represents being "burnt".

Even at this stage, having intended merely to rebuke the Liberals, the workers expected little or nothing from the new government. There was no noticeable change in the hostile climate of "public opinion". Incredulous when Cross, the new Home Secretary, approached them, the unionists could hardly believe their senses when the Tories prepared to repeat their newly-learnt "dishing" manoeuvre, almost upsetting the apple-cart by their distrustful refusal to give evidence before a further Royal Commission. Thus they almost deprived the Cabinet of the means of justifying its change of face to its own back-benchers. Only the defection of Macdonald, who was forced to resign his presidency of the Trades Union Congress (59) by the storm that resulted from his attendance before the Commission, suited the appearances to the event. And so the Trades Union Act of 1875 was passed, giving the unions almost everything they had asked for.

So rapid had been the conversion that the Junta never seemed to regain their breath afterwards; they had been dished along with the Whigs. They were totally astounded to find the whole of the "public opinion" of the country, with the sole exception of "Capital and Labour", applauding the new measure, where only a few weeks before there had been nothing from all sides but bitter opposition. (60) All this was now *hostility*

59. 1875 TUC report.

60. Howell: *op. cit.*, 369.

72.

forgotten -- so thoroughly that it seemed a figment of imagination. In hot pursuit of the workers' votes, both parties claimed the fatherhood of the legislation. Soon no-one who had not taken part could believe the battle had had to be fought; so the Junta were deprived of their hard-won laurels, and have scarcely been permitted to wear them since.

CHAPTER III

UNIONS OUTSIDE THE "AMALGAMATED" GROUP AND THE
UNSKILLED UNIONS OF THE SEVENTIES

A third aspect of the Labour movement of the seventies still remains for consideration. The previous two chapters have been concerned mainly with the "amalgamated" unions, but there is also the question of the extent to which the "amalgamateds" were typical of that time. And there is a similar problem in connection with the origins of the "new unionist" movement of 1889: why did this occur when it did -- are there any portents of its emergence in this earlier period? There were of course two great movements of trade union extension in the second half of the nineteenth century: as well as the "new unionist" expansion of the late eighties and early nineties -- which will obviously have to be examined in this present study -- there was an apparently similar occurrence in the early seventies. Was this "new unionism" too -- did the "new unionism" of the unskilled workers really come to birth in the seventies, temporarily dying away in the second half of that decade, only to revive again towards the end of the next? G.D.N.Cole claims that it did:

"...in the boom of the early 1870's the Trade Union movement was on the point of assuming the character which it took on more definitely in the 1880's.... But for the Great Depression which began in the middle seventies, British Labour would not have waited until 1889 before asserting itself as a

movement of the whole Labour class against exploitation." (1)

1. International Review for Social History II 1937, 21-22. While the following treatment is based largely upon Cole's article, it makes a different emphasis. Cole appears to regard the essential principle of the "amalgamated" system as being the closely centralised nation-wide organisation, as opposed to the pattern of loosely federated local societies. He argues that it was adopted by the craftsmen, and by them more especially, chiefly because, since the building of the railways, national organisation had become more suited to skilled workmen who were more liable to move about the country. One must agree, of course, that the development of cheap transport was of great importance for the rise of the "amalgamateds", although surely this was rather because of the facilities it provided for nation-wide competition in industry. It is true, certainly, that there was always a remarkable number of craft unionists travelling in search of work in the third quarter of the century, and the amalgamated device of warning them to avoid centres where a dispute was in progress does seem to have been of considerable value. But the present writer would argue that the essential feature of the "amalgamated" unionism was really the elaborate system of friendly benefits devised to serve also as an industrial weapon, and that the chief function of nation-wide organisation -- although it was certainly very valuable too for levelling up the standards of competing districts and enabling the prosecution of a nationally planned industrial policy -- was to strengthen the actuarial basis of this benefit system. This also appears to be the Webbs' analysis; they assert that the main innovation leading to the adoption of the "amalgamated" principle was the device of periodically "equalising" branch funds. (History 220). And the unionists themselves did not place much stress upon national organisation; in addition to its use to denote the system of elaborate benefits, they ~~also~~ employed the term "amalgamated" to refer to the principle of combining kindred trades -- as opposed to "sectional". It is probably of some significance that nation-wide organisation was usually adopted in those industries in which there was effective wide-spread competition and not in others, such as metal manufacture, where there was less competition between districts, even although the craft was highly skilled. But, as suggested in the text, the main reason for the failure of the less skilled unionists to adopt the "amalgamated" system was simply that, being more poorly paid, they could not afford it.

Cole also stresses the importance of apprenticeship in the "amalgamateds", his point being apparently -- though he does not seem to make it specifically -- that craftsmen

^{skilled and}
 engaged in each centre in the difficult task of preserving their privileged position from the encroachments of the unskilled in the same industry (who were of course advanced by their employers whenever possible), naturally turned to national organisation to strengthen their forces. Apprenticeship was, of course, the distinguishing mark of industries in which the interests of unskilled were opposed. But, while this struggle to protect their craft was certainly a very prominent feature of the work of the "amalgamateds", and apprenticeship, an important weapon in this struggle, required a certain degree of nation-wide standardisation, it seems to bear no really essential relation to their adoption of nation-wide organisation. Thus Cole's distinction between trades where apprenticeship was the practice and those where it was not has no real bearing on the adoption of the "amalgamated" system except incidentally -- trades which insisted upon apprenticeship were invariably highly skilled, and could thus afford the system. Relationships between the various groups of workers within an industry had little influence upon the type of organisation adopted; surely the less skilled unions too -- the miners for instance, as the Miners' Federation of 1886 was to show -- could have benefited equally from close national organisation. But, having no "scientific" benefit system, they were slower to see the need. The Lancashire textile unions, intermediate between skilled and unskilled societies, are another example; their benefits were much less elaborate, and they adopted loose federation, the local unions retaining control of their funds.

In the same article, largely a revision of the Webb's work, from which this quotation is taken, Cole also makes the point that the "amalgamateds" were not as representative as has been thought. In the first place, they did not capture the control of the Labour movement until later than has generally been believed -- not, in fact, until 1872 at the earliest. Moreover, although the Webbs regarded the "amalgamated" societies as models in the sense that their methods and form of constitution were soon copied more or less closely by a large proportion of the unions, in reality they were the pattern for only a comparatively limited group of imitators. (The Webbs did, in fact, carefully point out in their "History" that, on the one hand, the "amalgamateds" were hardly very novel in their practice and, on the other, that there was always a large number of unions which did not follow "amalgamated" methods, particularly in the use of friendly benefits, the essential feature of the "amalgamated" system. (2) But they did at least, perhaps inadvertently, give an exaggerated impression of the Junta's influence in this respect, and later writers have tended to increase this stress. The Webbs were fascinated by the elaborate structure of the "amalgamated" mechanism; and the records and press publicity of the "amalgamated" societies are comparatively much more plentiful than those of the other unions and have tended to strengthen the false impression of their relative prominence.)

The "new" model of the "amalgamateds" was suited mainly to highly skilled craftsmen who could earn wages high enough to afford the heavy contributions it required; and its nationwide pattern of organisation was most valuable to those industries, such as engineering, which were scattered through the length and breadth of the country so that district competed with district. Moreover, the "amalgamated" system was a highly sophisticated form of unionism, attractive to the bowler-hatted artisan but rather too genteel at this time for the cloth-capped, horny-handed worker. It did become the model for the metal-working trades -- smiths, brassfounders, pattern-makers, boiler-makers, and similar groups of metal-working craftsmen -- whose problems were generally similar to those of the engineers. They resisted the ASE's attempts to incorporate them, but copied its methods. Following the success of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, attempts were made to introduce the system into the other building trades, but it did not conquer them nearly as completely as it did the metal workers.

And this was practically the full extent of its conquests. Cotton and other textiles, cabinetmaking, coach-building, iron and steel manufacture, glass and glass-bottle-making, pottery, tailoring and boot and shoe manufacture remained through most of the seventies organised largely on a local basis, little influenced by the "amalgamated" model.

Further, Cole also claims in the same article that the Junta did not capture control of the labour movement until later than has generally been believed -- not, in fact, until 1872 at the earliest. It was only in that year that they became the "front bench" of the Trade Union Congress. And it was not really until the onset of the Depression that their less militant ideas became characteristic of the movement generally. Moreover, as is shown by the famous nine hours movement of the engineers in 1871-2, the comparative timidity of the Junta was not altogether accepted even by many of their own rank and file before this time. One instance of a union that did not follow the Junta's lead is the militant Amalgamated Association of Miners which broke away from Macdonald's National Miners' ^{Union} in 1869. Cole points out that, although the Webb's dismiss it as a relatively unimportant body, this Association reached dimensions almost equalling those of its rival, nearly 100,000 being represented at its 1873 conference compared with 123,000 at the National Miners' Conference of that same year. (3) Reference has also been made above to the fact that a body of unionists, headed by George Potter's London Workmen's Association, resented the action of the Junta in setting themselves up as representatives of the labour movement before the Royal

Commission of 1869. The Webbs also regarded this section as being of little significance; but again their judgment was mistaken. Despite Macdonald's moderation, he and the Scottish unionists who worked with him in securing the amendment of the Master and Servant Laws in 1867 were part of this group, together with practically the whole body of unionists in the provinces. Its strength is shown in the number represented at its 1867 Conference in London; with the usual duplications and exaggerations, about 600,000. (4) Quite a number of the London unions sent delegates - in fact, the great "amalgamateds" were practically the only abstentions. This conference should really rank as the first of the Trade Union Congresses. Even at this meeting, officially recognised as the first of the series, which was held the following year at Manchester, the Junta held aloof, coming into the movement only in 1871, when they saw that wider support was needed to repeal the Criminal Law Amendment Act (5).

Nevertheless, there is little sign of any spirit in this section resembling the aggressiveness of the "new" unionism of the nineties. Although some of these unions were more militant than the Junta wished, there is little sign that they were much more so, for evidently Macdonald, Kane and the moderate Scottish leaders did not find them too difficult

4. Ibid, 15, 23; Cole; Short History of the British Working Class Movement, 203.

5. International Review for Social History, II, 17-19.

to associate with. In his study of the building workers, Postgate came to the conclusion that their industrial policy differed very little from that of the "amalgamated" leaders. (6) And, as has already been seen, it was because of their manners more than any difference in the shade of their unionism that the Junta were not prepared to trust them before the Royal Commission.

Similarly, although the ground of Potter's quarrel with the Junta was his support of unions which refused arbitration, there is no evidence to support their charges that he was a "strike-monger" (7). It was probably his breach of discipline in calling a meeting of the London Trades without the consent of the London Trades Council and his control of the Beehive that hurt most. Having worked with them before the quarrel, he worked with them again after 1871.

Thus, while there is some indication that the rest of the trade union movement did not altogether accept the views of the Junta, which were themselves, when viewed against the background of the time, not as submissive to current employing-class thought as is often supposed, there is no sign yet, on the other hand, of any militant or

6. R.W. Postgate: *The Builders' History*, 195.

7. For this dispute between Potter and the Council, see "Mr. Potter and the London Trades Council", (Howell papers.)

socialistic attitude in any way similar to the "new unionism" of 1889. An examination still has to be made of the great expansion that took place in 1872-5; here, if anywhere, one would expect traces of the transformation that was to come later.

In 1872 the total membership of the unions affiliated to the Trade Union Congress was 270,000. Rising to 509,000 in 1873, and 594,000 for 1874, the figure more than doubled in two years, ^{recording} a total gain of about 320,000. After some ups and downs, it was resting at 568,000 in 1888; then it almost trebled, rising to 1,593,000 for 1890 - a gain of almost a million. (8) While the proportions of the two expansions are roughly similar, the greater total scale of the second movement, and the fact that to an extent it was superimposed on the first, suggest that there may have been a significant difference in the type of worker newly enrolled. (In 1892 Trade Union Congress membership fell from its temporary height to 1,155,000 which was ~~at~~ about the average for the nineties, total trade union membership being similarly stabilised at 1,501,000). In both cases a large part of the increase came from expansion of the older unions. In the seventies the largest of the new unions were those of the agricultural labourers, which accounted for almost half of the total gain; while in 1889 and 1890 it was dock-

workers, gas-workers and general labourers who were most prominent. Nevertheless, in the seventies too there were many general labourers and some dockers in the ranks of the farm workers (9) and there were also separate dockers' unions at London (10) and Liverpool (11) and separate unions of general labourers. (12) Gas-stokers, too, formed in 1872 the London union which was the centre of the famous conspiracy cases under the new criminal law. In addition unions were established in 1872-3 among carmen, cab and omnibus drivers, railwaymen, sailors and firemen, brick and tile makers, box-makers, builders' labourers and coal trimmers - all regarded as unskilled occupations. (13) There was also a beginning in the "white collar" group - the post office workers - a development that was also to be a characteristic of the later "new unionism". (14) Thus, though it hardly approached the dimensions of the later extension, there was a considerable stir of unionism among the unskilled at this time. But for two exceptions, however, little has been revealed.

-
9. See later discussion of Federal Union of Agriculture and General Labourers.
 10. Royal Statistical Society: Presidential Address of Charles Booth, 1892, (offprint in Howell papers).
 11. Sir James Sexton, Agitator (autobiography)
 12. Report of the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies and Trade Unions for 1875, App.P, 523ff.
 13. Ibid.
 14. H.G. Swift: The History of Postal Agitation I (1929 ed.), Ch.V.

of the aims of these bodies. They did not take an active part in the Congress debates, nor, did they challenge the policies of the Congress leaders. In fact the high proportion of these unions, especially among the general labourers, who included the words "Provident" or "Benefit" in their titles (15) suggests that they placed considerable stress on friendly society activities.

One group whose objects and history have been recorded in some detail was the group easily most prominent among them - the agricultural labourers. The organisation of this section of the wage-earning classes, regarded as the lowest, most helpless of workers, has commonly been instanced as a veritable revolution in trade union and social development. Unfortunately, a closer view of the facts leads one rather to the conclusion that here again the "Whig view" has managed to cast its shadow on history. Not only was there practically nothing of "new unionism", about the agricultural labourers' movement, not only was it far from representing a revolt against capitalism; to a large extent it was actually fostered and guided by capitalists for their own political purposes.

Certainly the position of the farm labourers was appalling, and certainly they were held down by squire and parson in a petty despotism that reached into every aspect

15. Report of the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies and Trade Unions for 1875, App.P, 520ff. Many of these unions, of course, did not register, and probably most which did were of this type.

of their private lives. They were not allowed political or religious opinions. They were forced to go to their betters for charity, and to kow-tow before they received it. The village schools, where their children were grudgingly given as harmless and as limited an education as possible, were under the same domination: the parson's wife in Arch's village prescribed the type of clothing that the pupils could wear. (16) Certainly, too, the movement was spontaneous in its immediate origins, although there had been a good deal of propuganda in the sixties, as the labourers themselves were well aware, about the conditions of farm workers. (17) The first important union, formed at Leintwardine, Herefordshire, in 1871, gathered 30,000 workers over six counties (18) within a year. (Its slogan - "emigration, migration, but not strikes" - is an illustration of its lack of militancy.) The origin of the main body, Arch's National Agricultural Labourers' Union, came from the workers themselves; it began when a group of labourers waited upon Arch to offer him the leadership. And when he had tramped many miles to address the first meeting he was amazed at the number that had gathered. (19)

-
16. Joseph Arch; The Story of his Life, 51.
 17. W. Hasbach; A History of the English Agricultural Labourer, 274-5.
 18. C.E. Fussell; From Tolpudle to TUC, 60.
 19. Arch, 68-74.

But, because the Liberals were the enemies of the Tory despots in the counties, Arch had been a Liberal since the early forties. (20) He had been a Non-conformist preacher too, and in his mind hostility to Anglicanism mingled with his Liberalism and with ideas of combination and land tenure reform. The Liberals, particularly from Birmingham, rushed to his aid immediately. So did the Nonconformists. In fact, the tone of the meeting at Leamington at which the National Agricultural Labourers' Union was launched was like that of a religious gathering; speaker after speaker addressed the audience as "my Christian friends", "beloved brethren", "dear fellow Christians", and so on. (21) One observer gave his opinion that the movement could have done little without the support of the Non-conformist preachers. (22) But from the beginning, from his own inclinations, strengthened apparently by the counsel of his advisers, Arch was wary of trade unionist helpers: as he put it - "We had to be on the sharp look-out to keep professional Trade Unionists from the towns in their places". (23) Eventually he accepted monetary help from the respectable Junta and their allies, who were only too willing to give it, both as Liberals and because they saw the competition of the underpaid farm workers as a vital menace to their security. Nevertheless, Arch

20. Ibid, 49.

21. Hasbach, 278.

22. Fussell 70 (quoting George Edwards).

23. Arch, 20.

gives no hint, even when writing in the nineties and despite his prominence since the seventies, in the Trade Union Congress, that he ever overcame this distrust. And when he won his way to Parliament in 1885 it was purely as a Liberal fighting against landowners: he called upon the newly-enfranchised farm workers to "deliver your country from the bondage of Toryism." (24)

The organisation Arch set up, the National Agricultural Labourers' Union, was as far as possible a direct reproduction of the amalgamated pattern, complete with a benefit system, despite the fact that it never could be and never was self-supporting. (25) (Certainly it had to meet the expenditure of a series of widespread lockouts, but in any case it could never have paid benefits and at the same time pursued a worth-while industrial policy.) When the subsidies from outside sympathisers were withdrawn at the onset of the Depression, the town unions particularly finding it difficult enough to preserve their own funds, all the agricultural unions quickly became inert. In the latter half of the eighties they had become purely benefit societies, greatly reduced in membership, and even so were living on their capital. (26)

Nevertheless, for all Arch's determination to keep the

24. Humphrey; A History of Labour Representation, 91.

25. Howell; Labour Legislation, etc. I, 258-9; Hasbach, 258, 292, 296.

26. Hasbach, 296-8.

National Agricultural Labourers' Union from the influence of professional unionists, he did not make the body as purely political as some of his Liberal supporters would have liked. Refusing to "have the cart of agricultural reforms stuck before the Union horse; though there was a body of men inside and outside the Union who kept urging us to adopt such a topsy-turvy way of driving to destruction," (27) he saw to it that the executive was composed only of agricultural workers, merely advised by a second committee of outside sympathisers who had no voting powers. (28) Some of the latter were evidently afraid that the Union would "sink into a mere organisation for Trade Union purposes", instead of becoming "a great moral uprising which promises to have the most beneficial result on the country at large." (29) But although determined too on the other hand to make the Union more than a mere organisation of village benefit clubs (such as already existed, but ^{were} giving little real assistance to the villagers) he was far from militant in his unionism. Constantly advising patience, moderation, and the exhausting of all other means before resource to strike action, he was praised even by "Capital and Labour" for his attitude; the Union's great contests were all lock-outs. (30) For this reason, he was very

27. Arch, 118; Howell; op.cit.259.

28. Arch, 112.

29. Ibid, 119.

30. Ibid, 116; Capital and Labour, 1874, 602; Hasbach, 289, 293.

high-handed in attitude towards other bodies that sought amalgamation, and, in order to keep policy strictly under his control, insisted that they surrender three-quarters of their income to his own organisation. The provision was, of course, a requirement of his "amalgamated" constitution; but he also seemed to take up the attitude that he did not greatly care for adhesions unless the new bodies came in as subordinates. Several agricultural unions which took exception to this dictation formed a rival organisation, the Federal Union of Agricultural and General Labourers, and this body also complained that the reforms advocated by the National Union's wealthy supporters -- the abolition of primogeniture and entail -- would be of no use to labourers, but would merely facilitate easy transfer from the present owners to other wealthy people. Significantly the unions in this Federation included some dock and other urban labourers -- as its title suggests; the National Union actually gave this fact as one reason for refusing affiliation. Nevertheless it was apparently even more pacific than Arch, charging him with adopting "a firebrand policy of strikes and disruption". (31) The tangle of alliances and antagonisms is almost fascinating; after referring to the wealthy supporters of its rival, the Federal Union went on to state that these sympathisers were apparently in

alliance with the town artisans, and retorted; "We have even now before us letters from wealthy men, enclosing subscriptions for agricultural labourers, expressing their sympathy from them as strongly as their disgust for the arrogance of the overpaid town artisans and mechanics."

In fact, half of the London Trades Council, led by W.R. Cremer, were reluctant to divide their ^{Council's} Agricultural Labourers' Fund between these two bodies, but wished to send it all to Arch's union. The first voting on the point gave an equal number for both courses, but eventually the money was divided - not, however, to the satisfaction of the Federal Union. A Manchester fund was also divided between the two bodies, £727 going to the National, £76 to the Federal Union, in a proportion apparently unfair to the latter organisation. (32)

Joseph Arch, in short, easily the most notable figure in the remarkable extension of unionism to the unskilled in the mid-seventies, was so far from being a "new" unionist that he copied the "amalgamated" pattern slavishly, even when the labourers could not afford the benefit system, and was constantly on his guard against anything less respectable in the slightest degree than the policies of the Junta. Even of them he seems to have had his suspicions; he does not qualify his use of the term "professional trade unionists."

32. For this whole dispute; Federal Union of Agricultural and General Labourers, Report (no date; Howell papers); London Trades Council, Annual Report 1873; also Hasbach, 286.

So far was the agricultural movement from being a revolt against capitalism that he was lavishly supported by factory-owning Liberals, who rightly saw in it nothing more than the continuation of the traditional contest of Liberalism against the eighteenth century domination of society by the landed classes. Having won their main victory at Westminster, but subjected still to guerilla attacks of "dishing" and factory legislation, they now carried the battle into the villages. They would "dish" the land-holders in their turn. But for their help the National Agricultural Labourers' Union would not have been nearly as successful as it was.

Summing up the findings, it is difficult to wholly agree with Cole that "but for the depression of the later 'seventies, the great movement which, ten years later, was to create the 'New Unionism' and express itself in the Dock Strike of 1889, would have proceeded without a break from the uprising (of the early 'seventies)."³³ Certainly, though Arch's domination and the strength of his support may have served to obscure a good deal of more militant spirit, there was very little of "new unionism" among the agricultural labourers who formed the great mass of the new bodies of

33. Cole; Short History of the British Working Class Movement, 220. (But see also the article cited above, p.22; "That the Trade Union leaders of the sixties and seventies were in no sense socialists I fully agree.")

unskilled workers. Nor were Potter's group of unions who opposed the Junta much more militant in principle; "they believed in (Applegarth's) principles and their opposition was hardly rational at all". (34) And, while our lack of knowledge of the other unions of the unskilled seems to indicate that they were not strongly opposed to "amalgamated" philosophies, there are positive indications that a large number of them actually imitated the "amalgamated" methods. On the other side of the case there are only Howell's vague warnings to the "new unionists" of 1889, for whatever they are worth, that he had seen all this crudity before.

Cole also supports his statement by pointing to the many ventures in co-operative production that were begun at that time: 163, in fact, between 1862 and 1880 - many in the Junta's own unions. (35) But, although, as has been claimed above, these are actually symptomatic of dissatisfaction with capitalism (and thus Cole seems to lend support to the present argument on this point), they have not a great deal in common with the militant socialist motivation of "new unionism". The moderate Macdonald could urge them on his miners, (36) and Howell give them a general blessing, though he was far from expecting them to prove a panacea for all working-class problems. (37) Moreover, many of these

34. Postgate; *The Builders' History*, 195.

35. Cole; *A Century of Co-operation*, 158.

36. Cole; *Short History of the British Working Class Movement*, 184-5.

37. *Conflicts*, 467-8, 471-4.

enterprises were started during strikes, especially among the miners and engineers, partly it seems as yet another weapon for the industrial contest. (38)

Although there had been widespread unemployment in 1869, the figure derived from union returns being about 7.5% compared with the 11% of 1879 and the 10% of 1885, (39) this does not seem to have left its mark on union thought as it did when repeated in severer doses in the Great Depression. In fact there were new developments in the economy between 1870 and 1890 that may well have given the "new Unionism" of the end of that period the full strength of its characteristics in a way that was much less likely at its beginning. For instance, dock work required much more skill and ingenuity in the seventies -- loading machinery was not yet much used for handling cargo. (40) For other reasons too, that will be discussed in a subsequent chapter, the scramble at the dock gates became much more intensive later. One indication will suffice for the present: the number of dock labourers increased more than 50% from 1881 to 1891. (41)

Thus there is little trace in the 1870's of any spirit much resembling the temper of "new Unionism". About all that remains is the fact that the unskilled did become organised;

38. Cole; A Century of Co-operation, 158ff.

39. Cole; Short History of the British Working Class Movement, 273.

40. Sexton, 66.

41. General Report 1891 Census, 53; General Report 1901 Census, 176-7.

and the very nature of their interests and their position in industry would probably have driven them to "new unionism" before long. And on the other hand there are signs that the moderation of the Junta, far as it was from being subservient to the capitalist attitude of that day, was unnatural even for a great many of its own rank and file. The nine hours movements of the engineers in 1871 and building workers in 1872 are surely indications of this uneasiness, for all the elaborate pains of the engineers at least to offer arbitration to the employers before ceasing work. (42) Further developments in industry, further experience of the harshness with which capitalism could treat them, and disillusionment with the actual results of Liberal-Labourism, seen in practice for the first time, would stimulate this discontent and the awakening ambitions of the unskilled into a deeper upsurging of revolt when once a period of rising prices made militant industrial action possible.

42. J. Burnett: A History of the Engineer's Strike in Newcastle and Gateshead.

CHAPTER IV.

ECONOMIC CHANGE.

(a) The Standard of Living of the Workers 1870-1900.

Any study of an expansion of trade unionism must, almost necessarily, discuss the material condition of the workers concerned. In fact it is usually assumed that somewhere in or very near this field the explanation for the movement will be found. "Economic unrest" -- a term employed as if self-evident, needing no further qualification -- has commonly been given as a cause of mass excitements in various periods of history; occasionally even "social unrest" has been used in a similar sense, vaguely implying a self-explanatory discontent with the material standard of life; such dissatisfaction, no further defined, is practically taken for granted in a Labour context. But what is "economic unrest"? Does it differ from incident to incident? Is it true, as Bowley suggests, that

"people are apt to measure their progress not from a forgotten position in the past, but towards an ideal which, like a horizon, continually recedes....the standard of living may rise considerably, but only over a long period; its change is not perceptible to a growing generation, which knows that its own means are insufficient for its desires." (1)

Do workers take notice mainly of money-wage levels? Or do they in fact adequately appreciate movements in real wages?

1. A.L.Bowley: Wages and Income since 1860, x.

Are their attitudes noticeably influenced by standards they set up for themselves - such as the conceptions that made tradesmen prefer unemployment to accepting unskilled work at labourers' rates? These and many similar questions lie within the vagueness of "economic unrest". As the attempt will be made in this thesis to answer some of them for one specific period, an investigation must first be made of the standard of living of wage-earners in and before the years being considered. And as a starting point, the question can perhaps best be expressed in these terms: was actual poverty an important cause of the increasing discontent of the Labour movement in the latter part of the nineteenth century?

Immediately a difficulty arises: what is "actual poverty?" Booth's well-known "poverty-line" - a measure of the level of wages required for mere maintenance of ordinary health - which he used for his survey of London life, was one attempt to answer this question, but such criteria seem of little value for our purposes. A more useful approach seems to be to compare the standard of living of the workers in the eighties and nineties with the condition of their class in the earlier years of the century.

All the evidence goes to show that, far from poverty being an important direct cause of the heightened discontent, the material standard of living of the workers rose higher than it had ever been in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. If poverty had been a main stimulus, then the

movement should surely have taken place much earlier. According to the index figures - using 1850 = 100 as a base - real wages rose gradually from 1810 to 1850, then remained fairly constant through the fifties. In the mid-sixties they rose as high as 117, then declined briefly and only slightly in 1867-8. From this point came a rapid rise in the boom period of the mid-seventies to a maximum of 137 in 1876. Although the onset of the "Great Depression" temporarily checked the upward movement, its effect on the index was very slight; the figure never fell below 132 (1878) and had again reached 137 by 1879, dropping again slightly to 134 in 1880, but rising higher than ever - to 139 -- as early as 1883. Thereafter it began a further climb that was virtually unbroken until the end of the century, reaching 148 in 1885, 166 in 1890, 176 by 1896, and 183 for 1900. (At the beginning of the new century a decline set in, the 1900 figure not being equalled again until as late as 1919.)⁽²⁾

Thus, by the mid-eighties, when the new temper began to appear, the real wages of the workers were no less than fifty per cent higher than they had been throughout the 1850's, and as much as 11-13 points above the very boom level of the previous decade. And they were to rise still further in the nineties to fully eighty percent higher than the 1850 level. Surely the evidence could not be more striking! (The accuracy of the Depression figures will be

2. See Table I.

(TABLE I)

WAGES, PRICES, AND UNEMPLOYMENT.

(1850=100)

Year	Money Wages			Retail Prices	% Unem- ployed.	Real Wages	
	Gen. Average	Allow- ing for Unemploy- ment	Man in Same Occupation			General Average	Allow- ing for Unemploy- ment.
1850	100	196	100	100	4.0	100	196
1855	116	110	114	126	5.4	95	90
1860	114	112	108	111	1.9	103	101
1865	126	124	118	107	2.1	117	115
1870	133	128	122	113	3.9	118	113
1871	138	136	127	113	1.6	121	120
1872	146	145	136	120	0.9	122	121
1873	155	153	141	122	1.2	128	127
1874	156	153	142	117	1.7	133	131
1875	154	150	140	113	2.4	135	132
1876	152	147	139	110	3.7	137	131
1877	151	144	138	113	4.7	133	127
1878	148	138	135	110	6.8	132	123
1879	146	129	131	103	11.4	137	121
1880	147	139	131	107	5.5	134	127
1881	147	142	131	105	3.5	136	131
1882	147	143	131	106	2.3	135	132
1883	149	145	132	102	2.6	139	136
1884	150	138	132	100	8.1	144	132
1885	149	135	131	96	9.3	148	134
1886	148	133	130	92	10.2	151	136
1887	149	137	131	89	7.6	155	143
1888	151	144	131	89	4.9	157	149
1889	156	153	136	91	2.1	159	155
1890	163	160	140	91	2.1	166	162
1891	163	158	140	92	3.5	164	159
1892	162	152	138	92	6.3	163	153
1893	162	150	137	89	7.5	167	155
1894	162	152	137	87	6.9	170	158
1895	162	153	136	84	5.8	174	163
1896	162	158	137	83	3.3	176	170
1897	166	161	139	86	3.3	176	170
1898	167	162	141	87	2.8	174	169
1899	172	168	144	86	2.0	180	176
1900	179	174	150	89	2.5	183	176

(Sources: the figures are Wood's, but I have taken them mainly from Layton and Crowther; The Study of Prices, 1935 edition, where the base 1850=100 is used, this base being most convenient for present purposes. Column 2 is my own calculation from Columns 1 and 5, and Column 3 comes from Bowley; Wages and Income since 1860 p.6. (Wood's figures) recalculated to the same base, and extended to 1850 from Clapham; Economic History, p.452).

discussed shortly, but for the moment the point is immaterial, as it is the long-term trend that is being considered.)

Moreover the evidence of the index figures, whose general trend at least can hardly be questioned, is confirmed rather closely by Wood's index of the average per capita consumption of various common foodstuffs, (3) which he was able to base on a precise quantitative measurement. Although it covers the whole of the population, the fact that it measures the consumption of necessaries make the figure a valuable guide to working-class conditions. If the averages for each decade are calculated, the following is the result, showing a very marked upward movement:

1860-9	81.1	(As can be seen, the base# is 1870-9 average = 100.)
1870-9	100	
1880-9	104.6	
1890-6	118.9	

And further confirmation is available from many contemporary observers. T.H.S. Escott's picture of working class conditions in 1886 was one of general well-being and comfort, though he could recognise squalor when he saw it; (4) and Howell and other Labour leaders of the older generation testified to the marked improvement over the last part of the century. (5)

-
3. Journal of the Royal Statistical Society 1899, 655-6.
 4. T.H.S. Escott: England, its People, Polity and Pursuits, Ch.X.; see especially 140-1, 152-3, 187.
 5. Labour Legislation, Labour Movements, Labour Leaders II, Ch.XLII, especially 475.

The Majority Report of the Royal Commission on the Depression of Trade of 1886 reported that, apart from the temporary distress through unemployment, "There is no feature in the situation which we have been called upon to examine so satisfactory as the immense improvement which has taken place in the condition of the working classes during the last twenty years." (6)

Thus it was obviously not general poverty among the workers that was the source of discontent. But there is another possibility - the index figures just given represent the general average of the workers: did all groups of workers fare equally well? Were there any groups whose gains were considerably smaller, or who even suffered a loss?

It does happen to be true, in fact, that behind these general index figures lies a change in the composition of the wage-earning population. In the course of his research, Bowley discovered that for a worker who stayed in the same occupation throughout this period the increase was much less than the general average, the difference amounting to about 11 points in 1870, 19 in 1885 and 22 by 1890. This is explained by the fact that a considerable movement of workers took place from lower into higher paid occupations. As one would expect from the history of agriculture in this

period, he found that the proportion of farm labourers at the foot of the scale diminished, and that at the same time the number of "black-coated" workers at the top increased, probably because of the closer and more complex organisation of industry. But he gives no details (in his description) of the process, and appears to assume that it was a general movement from each section to the next. (7) In many other places, however, there is evidence that the labourers who left the farms did not take up unskilled work; for instance, this was Booth's finding in the East End of London. (8) They moved higher, into the semi-skilled group, notably into mining (the number of miners greatly increased at this time), and there are even traces that many found places in the "skilled" occupations; even in the twentieth century many of the iron-workers on the North-East coast had come direct from the land. (9) Thus it would seem that few of the unskilled workers managed to better their position. An attempt has been made in the accompanying sketch diagram, (on the following page), which can only be approximate from the nature of Bowley's description of the movement, to illustrate the change that took place. (The lines of division could never, of course, be clearly drawn in any case.) It appears, therefore that the

7. Bowley 45-7.

8. For Booth's findings, see particularly Sir H. L. Smith; Migration of Labour (Transactions of the Political Economy Circle, Nat. Liberal Club. I (1890) 104). Smith, who had been one of Booth's assistants, stated that a generation or two of London life unfitted workers for responsible employment. They sank to the bottom of the scale and were replaced by a fresh influx of rural immigrants.

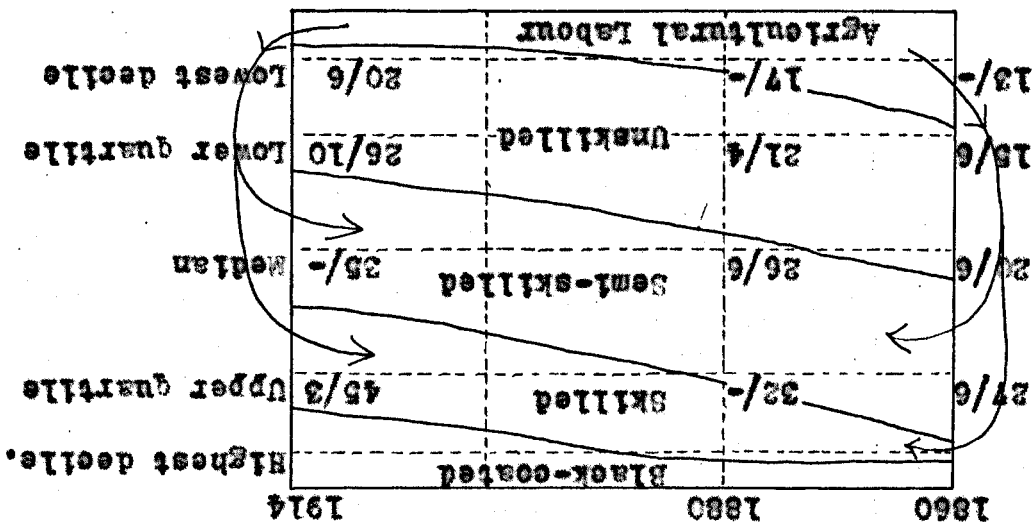
9. D. L. Burn; Economic History of Steel Making, 147.

CHANGING OCCUPATIONAL COMPOSITION OF THE POPULATION

1880 - 1914.

Incomes and Occupational Groups of Heads of Families.

(Including middle and upper classes.)



Note: Money wages rose only about 6% from 1860 to 1914. Bowley gives the following table for adult wage-earners only:

	1860	1880	1914
Highest decile	27 0	26 6	47 0
Upper quartile	22 6	28 0	39 4
Median	18 0	24 3	31 6
Lower quartile	14 6	20 0	25 2
Lowest decile	12 0	16 0	21 0

(Source: V.L. Bowley: Wages and Income since 1860, pp45-7).

unskilled workers, and the lower grades within this group even more especially, advanced much less over these years than the movement of the general average would suggest.

Moreover J. Kucyznski has calculated separate money wage figures for the "aristocracy of the workers" and the general "mass", purporting to estimate the difference in the movements of money wages for these two different groups⁽¹⁰⁾ which tend to confirm this finding. Using a base of 1900=100, he claims that the "mass" made a gain of 15 points from 1870 to 1900 compared with 21 for the "aristocracy".

The "mass" gained 15 points 1870-1873, but lost 17 points by 1879, and after regaining only 4 by 1882-3, lost these again and were below their 1870 level during 1885-7. Although about ten points were regained by the beginning of the nineties this meant that they were still 5 below their peak position of 1873-4, and they remained at about this level until 1898, regaining the peak figure of the seventies only at the turn of the century.

On the other hand, the gain of the "aristocracy" was only about half as much up to the peak in the mid-seventies, but their wage rates scarcely declined at all over the following ten years, and indeed remained much the same until 1895. And from this year till the end of the century they gained only 5 points. Thus from these figures it

10. See Table III.

would appear that the general rise in money wages for all workers was a compound of two very different movements. Not only did the mass gain relatively less over the whole period, but for almost the whole of the eighties, when the "aristocracy" were generally receiving money wages about 12% higher than they had earned in 1870, the "mass" were actually receiving less than they had been earning even before the peak of 1873-4. And until 1888 at least, the cost of living had not declined enough to make any appreciable difference. (According to Kuczynski, who gives more weight than is usual to the marked increase in rents, it did not decline a great deal in any case.)

It is difficult, however, to accept Kuczynski's selection of groups of workers to represent his two categories without important reservations. In the "aristocracy" he includes the engineers, ironfounders and building workers, giving the builders an equal weighting with the two groups of metal-workers combined, which is acceptable enough; but his "mass of the workers" comprises agricultural labourers, various groups of unskilled labourers (after 1874 only), cotton factory workers and coal miners -- a list that is open to obvious objections. He weights these groups as follows: agricultural labourers 1, unskilled labourers 4, (cotton workers 2 plus miners 1) 5. (11)

11. J. Kuczynski; Die Entwicklung der Lage der Arbeiterschaft in Europa und Amerika 1870-1933, 21.

WOCZYNSKI'S ESTIMATES OF MONEY AND REAL WAGES AND UNEMPLOYMENT
OF THE "ARISTOCRACY" AND "MASS" OF THE WORKERS AND OF

THE COST OF LIVING, 1850-1900.

(1900=100)

Year Money Wages Aristoc-Mass Gray. Real Wages Aristoc-Mass Gray. Cost of Living Wood Y Unemployed. Aristoc-Mass Gray.

1850	113	115	103	106	120	6.4	4.5	118	105	104	119	2.9	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	100	2.1	2.0
1855	141	141	125	120	128	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1860	105	105	103	103	109	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1865	120	120	103	106	128	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1870	79	79	85	78	109	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1871	79	87	80	80	109	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1872	81	94	82	82	114	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1873	84	100	86	86	116	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1874	88	99	88	88	113	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1875	88	97	89	89	109	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1876	90	96	83	83	108	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1877	91	94	83	83	110	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1878	90	90	83	83	108	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1879	89	83	86	81	103	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1880	88	84	83	79	106	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1881	89	86	85	82	105	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1882	89	87	86	84	104	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1883	89	87	85	85	102	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1884	88	88	88	94	90	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1885	88	83	86	86	98	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1886	88	82	87	87	94	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1887	89	82	93	87	94	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1888	89	85	88	88	97	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1889	90	81	92	94	97	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1890	91	93	93	96	97	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1891	92	95	94	97	98	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1892	92	92	94	94	98	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1893	92	92	96	96	96	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1894	92	91	98	97	94	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1895	93	93	100	98	93	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1896	95	91	103	99	92	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1897	96	92	102	98	94	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1898	98	93	102	97	96	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1899	99	96	104	101	95	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	
1900	100	100	100	100	100	4.1	1.9	128	109	104	118	2.5	2.2	102	102	103	103	103	100	2.1	2.0	

(See notes on next page)

Notes to Table II: The index figures given for earnings are gross figures, i.e. no attempt has been made to take unemployment into account. If this were done by the usual method, reducing the index figures by the unemployment percentage, it will be seen that the figures for the "mass" in the trough of the Depression would fall considerably below the level of the first part of the seventies, but, except for 1879, the figures for the "aristocracy" would not. A short table making this calculation for the Depression years is included in the text. In computing real wage index figures, Kuczynski's cost-of-living index has been used. Wood's cost-of-living index, recalculated to the base that Kuczynski employs, has been included for comparison; as is suggested in the text, this recalculation may introduce an error of one or two points in some of the figures. The source is J. Kuczynski: *A Short History of Labour Conditions under Industrial Capitalism Vol. I: Great Britain and the Empire, 1750 to the Present Day*, Appendix to Ch. II, the real wage figures being my own calculation from Kuczynski's indices. For Kuczynski's choice of wage data for the two groups of workers, see his *Die Entwicklung der Lage der Arbeiterschaft in Europa und Amerika 1870-1933*, pp. 21.

(Table III)

MONEY WAGES IN VARIOUS INDUSTRIES, 1850-1900.

(From Jurgen Kuczynski; A Short History of Labour Conditions under Industrial Capitalism I: Great Britain and the Empire, 1750 to the Present Day, p.70)

(1900=100)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Agri- culture.</u>	<u>Engineering, Shipbuilding, Metal Trades.</u>	<u>Cotton Textiles</u>	<u>Gas- workers.</u>	<u>Build- ing.</u>	<u>Print- ing.</u>	<u>Coal Miners.</u>
1850	48	66	48	67	58	81	
1855	67	74	53	68	63	81	
1860	66	72	63	70	68	81	
1865	69	77	66	73(1866)	71	81	
1870	76	77	76		76	83	
1871	80	79	79	80	77	86	
1872	87	83	82		79	86	
1873	92	86	83		80	86	
1874	96	87	84	107	84	91	89
1875	98	87	84	105	88	92	79
1876	98	87	86	105	90	93	71
1877	98	88	88	102	89	94	66
1878	96	87	82	92	88	94	62
1879	92	83	79	88	87	94	62
1880	88	84	81	90	87	94	61
1881	86	86	94	94	87	94	63
1882	86	88	84	94	87	94	68
1883	86	88	85	93	87	94	69
1884	86	87	85	94	87	94	66
1885	84	86	84	90	87	94	63
1886	84	84	83	89	87	94	61
1887	85	85	85	90	88	94	61
1888	87	88	88	94	88	94	65
1889	88	91	89	95	89	94	76
1890	90	93	90	95	90	96	86
1891	91	93	93	97	96	98	87
1892	92	92	95	96	91	98	79
1893	92	91	94	95	92	99	80
1894	93	91	94	95	93	99	76
1895	92	91	94	95	94	99	73
1896	92	94	95	95	97	99	72
1897	93	96	96	95	96	99	73
1898	95	98	96	95	98	99	79
1899	96	100	99	98	99	99	84
1900	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

(Note: The figures are actually Bowley's ² Woods. Bowley gives a similar table in his Wages and Income Since 1860, p.8, but does not go back there beyond 1880. The gasworkers' figures are from Wood, Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, 1909, p.93.)

Moreover this wage data for the unskilled labourers is not very representative. He obtains it from the fourth Report of the Board of Trade on Trade Unions, the figures used consisting merely of a handful of wage rates furnished by the Kent^{2d} Sussex Labourers' Union, and the fifteenth Report of the Commissioner of Labour, Washington, D.C., which is no more satisfactory, giving only widely different sets of minimum and maximum figures, without indication of the general rate.⁽¹²⁾ Gas-stokers' earnings certainly do not conform to the movements of his "mass" index.

Whatever their precise movements were, it seems true to state that the money wages of unskilled workers did not increase nearly as much over the half century as the general average of wages. This may have some significance for the origins of the "new unionism" among the unskilled workers; this point will be given further discussion later. Nevertheless, this qualification of the general finding does not greatly alter the fact that real wages for all workers, skilled and unskilled, had increased markedly by the eighties in comparison with earlier decades.

On the other hand, this does not mean that there was not still actual poverty among the working-class, and in abundance. In the light of the general improvement that

12. Report of the Board of Trade on Trade Unions for 1889-90, 241; 18th Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labour, Washington, D.C., 836ff.

had occurred, it comes as a shock to discover--as it was a startling shock to the Victorians, who had accepted the continual bettering of material living standards as the great justification for their whole austere system of beliefs --Booth's incontestable conclusion that a third of the population of London were living below his very moderate poverty line. So much better than previous decades, and yet so poor! And Booth's figures for London was confirmed by Rowntree for York. Apart from these findings from detailed, objective research, Bowley's lower quartile wage of 20/- and median wage of 24/3 for 1880 reveal a state of affairs that was far from justifying complacency; life was rather a grim struggle even at this median level. Moreover, Booth's famous poverty line, which was meant to cover the bare necessities for the maintenance of ordinary health, did not pass unchallenged by contemporaries; Hyndman for instance presented a household budget to the Royal Commission on Labour of 1892 which seemed to show its utter inadequacy and which was not controverted. (13) In 1937 Bowley described Booth's standard as "a line which is now regarded as a very undesirable minimum." (14) Further apparent confirmation came from quite

13. Fourth Report, Evidence, XXXIX; see H. Lynd; England in the Eighteen-Eighties, 52.

14. op. cit., XI.

an independent quarter when in his annual report for 1902 so impartial an authority as the Inspector-General of Recruiting stated:

"The one subject which causes anxiety in the future as regards recruiting is the gradual deterioration of the physique of the working classes, from which the bulk of the recruits must always be drawn."

The Inter-Departmental Committee set up in the resulting alarm confirmed this opinion. (15) But probably this deterioration was due mainly to housing and similar social conditions in the great industrial cities (questions that will be considered in the following chapter). In any case, it was not caused by declining real wages. And since - as will be seen - only a small fraction of unskilled workers entered the trade union movement and they formed only a small fraction of that movement, it could not have been their own poverty but must have rather been concern for the condition of the lower classes that goaded the unions into more determined industrial and political activity, if indeed poverty played any notable part in stimulating that activity. In the early eighties in fact, possibly under the stimulus of the socialist criticisms and middle-class questionings of that time, the unionists were beginning to make references to the poverty about them, the Parliamentary Committee's Report to the 1884 Trades Union Congress stating "No person can walk the streets of our great

cities without mental anguish at the sights of misery and suffering there to be seen" (16) and Threlfall asking, as Conference President in 1885: "Are you satisfied with the miserable condition in which vast masses live?" (17) They speak as men generally content with their own earnings as sufficient for self-respect, recognising it as "one of the cardinal principles of unionism....to assist those who are less fortunate." If as yet they could suggest no remedy and did not accept the problem as being their concern any more than it was a matter for the rest of the community, they were conscious that the condition of those below them was an insufferable blot on the national life.

Nevertheless, if the general trend of real wage conditions had much to do with the origins of "new unionism", their marked rise over the previous part of the century, even for the lower grades of workers, surely indicates that it was much less a case of actual poverty causing discontent than of improved conditions helping to awaken ambitions for still further gains, material, social or political (18) and in addition, heightening sensitivity to the hardships of others.

16. T.U.C. Annual Report 1884, 14-15.

17. Ibid. 1885, 18.

18. One foreign observer described the cause of discontent as "overprosperity"! (Shadwell: Industrial Efficiency II, 460).

(b) The Condition of the Workers in the "Great Depression".

The effect of the "Great Depression" and its year-by-year fluctuations is, of course, a different question. (It will be more convenient, since they are probably more short-term, in their effect on workers' attitudes, to discuss the movement of money wages in connection with this topic.)

What was the "Great Depression"? The Royal Commission in 1886, set up to investigate it, had some difficulty in discovering just what was depressed, and went to considerable pains to establish this point. Later writers, notably H.L. Beales (1), have pointed out that in many respects the term "Great Depression" seems a misnomer: it is difficult to delineate any clear period, production generally continued to expand, real wages to rise. (Generally the term is used as referring approximately to the ten years from 1877 to 1887; but conditions were reasonably normal from about 1882 to 1884, and on the other hand, despite the boom of 1874-5, it is readily feasible to include the whole period from about 1868 to 1895.) Considering the general stability of the total national real income, there hardly seems to have been depression at all in the usual meaning of the word. Those who

1. Economic Review V, Oct. 1934, 65-75; Revision in Economic History: The "Great Depression" in Industry and Trade. The following general treatment of the Depression in its general economic aspects and its relation to nineteenth century industrial development is based upon this article and W.W. Rostow: British Economy of the Nineteenth Century, M. Dobb: Studies in the Development of Capitalism, D.A. Wells: Recent Economic Changes, J.H. Clapham: Economic History of Modern Britain II and III, etc.

were loudest in their complaints were the investors. What then were the characteristics of the economy in this period? Prices of practically all commodities fell to unprecedented levels; capital resources for home production reached unprecedented quantities as the result of unusually large investment in home industry; but production was now impossible at the rates of profit previously recognised as normal, and in many cases could apparently only be continued at a loss. Interest rates fell to an extremely low level.

Some indication of the revolution that occurred is given in the figures for British export trade, when the values that were actually obtained are compared with the value of the same quantity of exports at the original 1873 prices:

	<u>Value at Current Prices</u>	<u>Value at 1873 Prices.</u>
1873	£255,000,000	£255,000,000
1879	£191,500,000	£273,000,000
1883	£240,000,000	£349,000,000

Thus, although the physical volume of exports increased by almost 40% over the decade, the total returns from this quantity were actually £15,000,000 less at the end of the period than they had been at the beginning. (2) Slightly more than twelve million tons of coal were exported in 1873, selling for £12,370,000 (admittedly quite an abnormal year); the twenty-two million tons shipped in 1884 realised only

2. Royal Commission on Depression of Trade 1886, Final Report, XII.

£10,000,000. Meanwhile the amount of coal on the home market increased by 22 million tons. (3) It was the price of steel, however, which fell most sharply -- from £8 a ton to 42/-. (4) Although the increase in production tended to counter-balance the fall in prices and thus enabled the national income to remain fairly constant, and even enabled real income to rise, such a shock to the economy inevitably had marked repercussions.

For our present purposes it is not relevant to discuss the causes of the depression in any detail. However we may note in passing that the part played by monetary factors, particularly by any inadequacy in the supply of gold, has now been relegated very much to the background. Regarding the immediate causes, W.W. Rostow places most stress on the redirection of investment into the home market -- the result of a sudden loss of confidence in foreign governments -- which of course greatly increased total productive resources but at the same time greatly lowered the "marginal productivity" of capital. Other short-term influences, such as the opening of the Suez Canal, the slackening-off in railway construction, and the change-over from iron to steel, coincided in time, and also had an important effect. Far from ^{there} being a shortage of "money" at any stage -- as the monetary theorists and politicians suggested -- there was ample capital seeking investment even at the low rates of return.

3. Ibid, evidence Q.12, 107.

4. Ibid, Q.2217.

But this short-period explanation must be placed against the background of developments over a longer period. One of the effects of the industrial revolution, which in many industries was only now reaching an advanced stage, had been to keep swelling the stock of capital equipment throughout the century: a fall in retail prices and interest rates, unaccompanied by any fall in wages (the supply of labour being relatively limited), was only to be expected as a main consequence of the natural development of modern industry. While the sudden switching of investment from the foreign to the home market gave this trend a sudden acceleration, the long-term movement was no less important and would have brought about the same permanent results. A second factor, also giving a sudden accentuation to the general trend, was the end of Britain's virtual monopoly of international trade. (This development too was to be permanent in its effects, though for many years yet the flow of "invisible" exports was to shelter the nation from its full rigours.) Rather suddenly, at the close of the Franco-Prussian and American Civil Wars, other nations entered world markets. Britain could no longer dispose of her increasing production under the old monopoly conditions; the tendency for prices to fall was strongly reinforced. The world market lost its "inelasticity".

British manufacturers could no longer make profits so

But this short-period explanation must be placed against the background of developments over a longer period. One of the effects of the industrial revolution, which in many industries was only now reaching an advanced stage, had been to keep swelling the stock of capital equipment throughout the century: a fall in retail prices and interest rates, unaccompanied by any fall in wages (the supply of labour being relatively limited), was only to be expected as a main consequence of the natural development of modern industry. While the sudden switching of investment from the foreign to the home market gave this trend a sudden acceleration, the long-term movement was no less important and would have brought about the same permanent results. A second factor, also giving a sudden accentuation to the general trend, was the end of Britain's virtual monopoly of international trade. (This development too was to be permanent in its effects, though for many years yet the flow of "invisible" exports was to shelter the nation from its full rigours.) Rather suddenly, at the close of the Franco-Prussian and American Civil Wars, other nations entered world markets. Britain could no longer dispose of her increasing production under the old monopoly conditions; the tendency for prices to fall was strongly reinforced. The world market lost its "inelasticity".

British manufacturers could no longer make profits so

easily. In fact, some of their plant was obsolescent, so that they were meeting their newly-equipped competitors under a handicap; yet years of monopoly and too-easy success had left them with a tendency to conservatism and self-satisfaction. Second and third generation managers, brought up in a softer school than their fathers and usually with less natural ability, were beginning to appear. (5) The old easy-going Golden days of British industry were gone; temporary alleviations were to be obtained from new expansions of foreign investment in the eighties and again in the nineties, but the new intensity that had come into the whole atmosphere of industry was to remain.

How did the workers fare in the midst of the "Great Depression"? Firstly, leaving aside for the moment the ways in which they were affected by the long-term trends, what was the immediate, short-term effect on their earnings of the sudden fall in their employers' profits? Although the total volume of production did not decrease because of the greatly increased productive resources, many firms closed down some or all of their plant or worked short time, the coal, iron and ship-building trades being particularly

5. There was considerable dispute about the degree of Britain's backwardness in technique and general management in this period; D.L.Burn (op.cit.) seems to establish that it was considerable. See more especially his Chs.IV and V; also Burnham & Hoskins; Iron and Steel in England 1870-1930, and for other industries, British Industries under Free Trade (H.Cox, ed.), 241, 324ff.

affected. No statistics were kept that would indicate with any accuracy the general degree of unemployment; we know only that in the worst years many unions, the boilermakers' and ironworkers' particularly, had a very high proportion of members drawing out-of-work benefit. (The detailed figures for each year will be examined shortly). Yet the index figures for real wages (6) appear to show that aggregate real (earnings) were scarcely affected at all; after the peak of 137 for 1876, the figures for the following six years are 133, 132, 137, 134, 136, 135, and then 139, 144 and 148 for 1883, 1884 and 1885 respectively. In short, the real wage index gives practically no indication that a depression existed.

If attention is turned instead to the movement of money wages, rather a different trend is seen, for over this ten-year period the generally high level of real wages had been the result largely of the steady decline in retail prices. If the workers took more note of money wages than of their real earnings, perhaps part at least of the explanation for their discontent is to be found here. In fact, after a peak of 154 in 1875, money wages fell over the next ten years, the index figures being as follows: 152, 151, 148, 146, 147, 147, 147, 149, 150, and 149. And they did not regain their 1875 level until as late as 1889 (retail prices having fallen

6. For these and the figures in following paragraphs see Table I except where otherwise indicated.

further to 91 in the meantime -- sending real wages to unprecedented heights). But even so the fall is so slight, the extreme range being only 8 points, that, making every allowance for the irrational element and fully considering the fact that workers probably feel the hardship of reductions much more than the benefit of similar increases, it would hardly seem in itself to give cause for very marked dissatisfaction.

If, however, unsatisfactory as they are, we admit the possibility that Kuczynski's figures differentiating the "aristocracy" from the "mass" of workers, already referred to, may have an approximate general validity, our conception of the movement of money wages in the Depression may have to be qualified considerably. The marked difference he shows in the movement of wages for these two groups seems to be due almost entirely to the conditions that created the boom, and the subsequent Depression. The "aristocracy", he claims, maintained their gains of the early seventies almost completely - and this accords with Howell's general impression. Moreover, this part of his calculations, seems to be based upon Bowley's and Wood's year by year indices for the various trades, which show a maximum decline of only 4 points (on a base of 1900=100) for the engineers and boilermakers, 9 for the cotton workers, 3 for the builders, and none at all for the printers. (However they do not place much reliance

on their figures for before 1880).⁽⁷⁾ But for the "mass" of the workers including the miners who lost no fewer than 30 points, Kuczynski's year by year figures show a maximum decline as follows of no less than 18 points.⁽⁸⁾

1873	100	1881	86
1874	99	1882	87
1875	97	1883	87
1876	96	1884	86
1877	94	1885	85
1878	90	1886	82
1879	83	1887	82
1880	84	1888	85

(1900=100)

Although the cost of living declined in the interval, it fell only to about the same extent, even in Wood's estimate, and thus this group were earning about the same amount in real wages in the middle of the eighties as they had obtained in the best years of the seventies. (This generalisation excludes Kuczynski's figure, as given below, for the year 1884, which is extraordinarily high because of a remarkable drop of 12 points for that year in his cost of living index.) The following table illustrating this point, is a conversion of the previous one into real earnings, the first column using Kuczynski's cost of living index, and the second using Wood's index recalculated to the base of 1900=100. (This process may have introduced an error of one or two points into this second column.)

7. Table III

8. Table IX.

REAL WAGES OF THE "MASS" OF THE WORKERS1870-90

1900=100	<u>(using Kuczynski's Cost of Living Index)</u>	<u>(using Wood's Cost of Living Index)</u>
1870	78	66
1871	80	68
1872	82	70
1873	86	73
1874	88	74
1875	89	76
1876	89	77
1877	85	73
1878	83	73
1879	81	72
1880	79	70
1881	82	73
1882	84	73
1883	85	76
1884	94	75
1885	86	78
1886	87	80
1887	87	82
1888	88	85
1889	94	89
1890	96	91

It was probably, however, the decline in money wages rather than the movement of real wages, together with the extreme fluctuations in employment that contributed most to the workers' discontent. And this may well be so despite the fact, which the workers ^{may} not have heeded, that wage rates had reached what seemed to be quite abnormal heights in the course of the previous boom. This certainly seems to have been true of the miners, who many years later tended to measure their earnings (which under the sliding scales had fallen sharply with the rapid decline in coal prices), against the swollen 1875 level as if this were a standard.

Nevertheless, despite these possible qualifications, it is difficult to reconcile any of these sets of figures with the disintegration of unions that actually took place. Undoubtedly a great number of unions went out of existence or declined very severely in membership. Looking back upon this period, unionists such as Howell saw it as a time of great distress marked by serious defeats at the hands of ^{the} employers; only strongly established unions were able to ride out the storm, and then only by becoming inert in industrial policy. (9) The course of the Depression seems very real in the history of unionism. How could this have been so without very severe reductions in earnings? Possibly the workers who were newly organised had been those who had made the greatest gains in the seventies, and now suffered the greatest reductions -- a movement that might not show its full extent in the general average. But, although the reductions that did take place among the miners, -- for instance, show signs of such a tendency, and it may possibly have been even more marked in trades where the unions collapsed completely, (although gasworkers' earnings fell only slightly), it still does not seem possible to explain the

Labour Legislation, etc.,
 9. ~~Op cit.~~ II 392: "The Depression reached its lowest level in 1879, in which year there was sadness and gloom, distress and privation in many districts of the land. The younger men of today can have no conception of the fearful struggles in the five years 1873-9. The decline of England was deplored, its ruin as a great industrial nation predicted."

blow suffered by the unions in this way without calling the accuracy of the index figures into question. The reductions must surely have been too great and too widespread not to have more effect on the averages. And surely the unorganised workers must have suffered heavy reductions too; their wages ^{must} also have risen considerably in the boom years, when, because of the abnormal volume of investment, there was apparently an actual shortage of labour.

Thus one is led to doubt the accuracy of the indices. And there is legitimate ground for doubt: the statisticians themselves admit the inadequacy of their data, especially for the worst years. Is there any other evidence of the condition of the workers at this time? Firstly, what of the degree of unemployment?

The unemployment statistics for this period, derived from trade union records, do seem to conform to the accepted pattern of the depression. For 1875-1889 the percentage figures for all unionists making returns run as follows:

1875	2.4	1885	2.6
1876	3.7	1884	8.1
1877	4.7	1885	9.3
1878	6.8	1886	10.2
1879	11.4	1887	7.6
1880	5.5	1888	4.9
1881	3.5	1889	2.1
1882	2.3		

For individual unions the figures are even more impressive.

In 1872, the best year, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers reported an average of 0.6% of their members unemployed, the

Friendly Society of Ironfounders 1.4%, the Associated Ironmongers of Scotland 2.7%, the United Society of Boilermakers and Iron Shipwrights 1.0%, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners 1.2%, and the figures for other trades were similar. As early as 1874 the Ironmongers' figure rose to 7.3; by 1876 it was 10.0, and the percentage for the Boilermakers had also risen by that time to 8.5. In the worst year, 1879, the Engineers returned 10.6, the Ironfounders 23.3, the Ironmongers also 23.3, and even the Carpenters and Joiners, who rarely had many members out of work, reported 8.2%. Work was fairly plentiful again by 1881, when the Engineers were back to 3.5%, but the two societies of ironworkers still had more than 8% unemployed that year. In 1882 the Boilermakers' figure was only 0.7. The percentages mount again, however, between 1884 and 1887, the Engineers returning 7.6 for 1886, while the Ironfounders' figures for these four years were 7.8, 11.5, 14.6, and 10.6, and the Ironmongers' 23.1, 31.6, 34.2 and 26.0. And it was apparently at this time that the Boilermakers felt the full force of the Depression, their percentages for this period being 20.8, 22.2, 21.6 and 16.7 -- more than twice as severe as in the latter half of the seventies. The Carpenters and Joiners, returning 4.7, 7.1, 8.2 and 6.5, were also sharing the burden again.

Although the instability shown here is certainly very marked, it is actually little worse than some previous recent

(Table IV)

PERCENTAGES OF MEMBERS UNEMPLOYED IN VARIOUS TRADE UNIONS
1870-1900.

(From Cd. 2337: Second Series of Memoranda, etc., prepared in the Board of Trade with Reference to British and Foreign Trade and Industrial Conditions, 1904, pp 372f.)

Year	Amal. Socy. of Engineers.	Friendly Socy. of Ironfounders.	Assoc. Ironmoulters of Scotland.	U.S. of Boiler-makers & Iron S'wrights	Amal. Socy. of Carpenters & Joiners	Woodworking & Furnishing Trades (a)	Printers and Bookbinders (b)	Other Trades.
1870	4.1	7.2	3.8	--	3.7	4.8	2.8	0.2
1871	1.0	2.3	1.0	--	2.8	2.5	2.5	0.3
1872	0.6	1.4	2.7	1.0	1.2	2.4	2.0	0.0
1873	0.9	3.3	4.0	1.2	0.9	1.9	1.5	0.3
1874	1.4	4.1	7.3	2.5	0.8	2.1	1.3	0.1
1875	2.3	3.7	7.9	5.9	0.6	2.0	1.6	0.3
1876	3.5	6.0	10.0	8.5	0.7	2.4	1.6	1.3
1877	4.8	9.4	10.8	8.2	1.2	3.5	2.5	2.8
1878	6.9	15.1.	17.4	9.4	3.5	4.4	3.2	3.0
1879	10.6	23.3	23.3	9.5	8.2	8.3	4.0	3.3
1880	5.0	11.5	11.5	8.0	6.1	3.2	3.2	2.2
1881	3.5	8.3	8.5	1.8	3.2	2.7	2.8	1.5
1882	1.9	4.7	11.0	0.7	3.5	2.5	2.4	0.9
1883	2.2	4.7	8.1	2.1	3.6	2.5	2.2	1.2
1884	4.8	7.8	23.1	20.8	4.7	3.0	2.1	1.4
1885	6.7	11.5	31.6	22.2	7.1	4.1	2.5	1.8
1886	7.6	14.6	34.2	31.6	8.2	4.7	2.6	5.2
1887	6.1	10.6	26.0	16.7	6.5	3.6	2.2	1.9
1888	4.2	5.9	13.5	7.3	5.7	3.1	2.5	3.2
1889	1.9	2.0	5.1	2.0	3.0	2.4	2.1	0.0
1890	1.7	2.6	6.8	3.4	2.2	2.5	1.9	1.6
1891	3.2	5.0	13.3	5.7	1.9	2.1	2.9	1.7
1892	6.3	9.2	17.1	10.9	3.1	3.8	3.6	5.6
1893	8.3	10.8	20.8	17.0	3.1	4.1	4.1	2.6
1894	8.5	10.9	17.2	16.2	4.3	4.4	5.7	2.1
1895	5.9	8.6	18.1	13.0	4.4	3.6	4.9	3.5
1896	2.2	3.2	9.1	9.5	1.3	2.0	4.3	3.0
1897	2.4	7.5	8.4	8.0	1.2	2.2	3.9	2.6
1898	2.5	3.5	6.5	4.7	0.9	2.3	3.7	2.3
1899	2.4	1.8	5.8	2.1	1.2	2.1	3.9	2.4
1900	2.2	3.0	10.2	2.3	2.6	2.8	4.2	3.1

(a) The Furnishing Trades Assn. (Alliance Cabinetmakers), Amalgamated Woodcutting Machinists (Amalgamated Millsawyers) & United Coachmakers.

(b) London Compositors, the Typographical Assn. & London Bookbinders

experience, the general figure for all the unions having been as high as 12% in 1858, when the Engineers had returned 10.2% and the Ironfounders 16.6%, and 8% for 1862 and 1868, two years when the Engineers reported 7.2 and 7.9%, the Ironfounders 14.1 and 18.6% respectively. But for some reason it certainly seems to have made more impression upon the workers before the Depression for instance, the shorter-hours movements appear to be much less motivated than they were in the eighties by the aim of decreasing unemployment by limiting "over-production", the appeal seeming to be much more to the general advantage of increased leisure. (10)*

However, nineteenth century unemployment statistics are no more satisfactory than the indices of earnings. Based as they are on trade union returns, they cover only a small fraction of the workers. Apart from the fact that the unionists themselves numbered only about an eighth of the workers - a consideration that may not be important since the unions were in fact the organised labour movement (11)* - they take no account even of large sections of the unions, including the textile operatives and the miners, because they

10. See Table IV; also W.H. Beveridge: Full Employment in a Free Society, 40-6.

11. Nevertheless, see the argument at the close of this chapter that one characteristic of the "new" movement was increased sympathy for the lower grades of workers.

had no #out-of-work benefit and thus recorded no unemployment figures. Moreover many of these sections, the miners particularly, rarely became "unemployed" but instead worked "short time", which might be four, three or even two days a week. These general percentages have also been challenged on the one hand with being too high, for the whole body of the workers, since they give over-much weight to the notoriously unstable shipbuilding and metal trades, and on the other hand with being too low, on the ground that unemployment would be probably higher among the unorganised unskilled workers, since these would be the first to be discharged. On the whole there seems to be more justification for the former criticism, which in fact seems to have been borne out by a study of the much more complete figures available in the twentieth century (12) And in fact the table shows that, among the unions making returns, the figures did remain reasonably low except for the notorious ^{metal} trades. In addition, as will be seen in a moment, there was a tendency during the Depression, which cannot, however, be measured, for unskilled workers to be employed in place of skilled men. Although Kuczynski has given separate unemployment figures for the "aristocracy" and "mass" of the workers, showing no appreciable difference between the two groups (see Table II), it is very difficult

12. Journal of the Royal Statistical Society 1899, 669;

to imagine - and he does not explain - where he can have obtained any unemployment data for the "mass". In short no definite conclusion can be reached.

In an attempt to give some numerical effect to this factor of unemployment, the statisticians resorted to the ^{rather} arbitrary method of reducing the index figures for wages by the percentages of unemployment. Applying this technique to the figures for real earnings, the result is as follows: (13)

1874	131	1883	136
1875	132	1884	132
1876	131	1885	134
1877	137	1886	136
1878	133	1887	143
1879	121	1888	149
1880	127	1889	155
1881	131		
1882	132		

This device gives the fall a more startling appearance, the maximum range being now 11 points. But there is still no sign of hardship in the eighties, when many of the workers complained that they were more severely hit than in 1879. (14)

When the same technique is applied to money wages, these figures result:

1874	154	1882	143
1875	150	1883	145
1876	147	1884	138
1877	144	1885	135
1878	138	1886	133
1879	129	1887	127
1880	139	1888	144
1881	142	1889	155

13. See Table I.

14. For example, in the replies to the Royal Commission of 1886.

The movement here becomes much more marked, with a maximum fall of as much as 35 points. (If, for the sake of curiosity, the same calculation is made with Knuzynski's indices, the result, on his base of 1900=100, is a maximum fall in real wages of 14 points for the "mass" compared with 4 points for the "aristocracy". For money wages, the maximum decline is 24 and 8 points respectively. Here possibly, if the results of this device mean very much in any real sense, is the basis for a psychological explanation for the workers' discontent (pre-occupation with money wages being ^a psychological phenomenon). But do these figures mean much, and could they account for the shattering of the unions? They still do not alter the fact - merely tending to obscure it - that the earnings of those who were able to keep employed remained relatively high and stable -- much more so than one would expect from the history of the unions over these years. And, considering the different condition of the various traders, they carry generalisation too far to be of much significance.

It is at least interesting to notice that ^{at} a meeting of the Royal Statistical Society where Wood read a paper presenting some of these figures and drew the general conclusion that the workers did not suffer very badly in the Depression, Howell (who was a fellow of the Society) challenged his findings in the light of his own experience of that time. (Real wage figures had been presented; no reduction of

money wage indexes by unemployment percentages, such as the table above, had been used.) He argued that the data must be "insufficient". "The period of 1875-9 was referred to as a period not of very great depression, as compared with other periods. Now in reality there never was a period during the century when trade was so greatly depressed as in the latter part of the decade ending in 1879." In particular, he suggested that figures based upon the actual payments of out-of-work benefit made by the unions might give a truer indication. In reply, Wood calculated figures on this basis which gave a very similar result. (15) Nevertheless, it would seem that the figures generally do not accord very well with the historical facts. They actually led Lord Layton to suggest that the failure of the unions to make gains in membership in the early eighties was due to the ^{circumstances} fact that real earnings were increasing! (16)

It may well be that it was the extreme fluctuation of the degree of unemployment rather than the proportion out-of-work in the worst years that was an important factor in arousing the workers' dissatisfaction. They may have come to accept the conditions of 1871-5, when the figures were 1.6, 0.9, 1.2, 1.7 and 2.4, - a situation which would today be

15. Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, 1899, 667; 1900, 81.

16. Layton and Crowther: The Study of Prices (1935'ed.), 97.

described in many quarters as "over-employment"—as the normal and expected state of affairs. (Beveridge regards 3% as desirable full employment.) (17) It is curious, at least, that the term "unemployed" should first be used as a noun in 1882, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, and "unemployment" only in 1888. Evidently it was only in the eighties that this recurrent phenomenon became recognised as a problem of industrialisation. It is more than likely too, that the rise in their standard of living made the workers - and many of the rest of the community - more resentful of such hardship.

Before the subject of the incidence of unemployment during the Depression is dismissed, the question of the general average over these depression years in comparison with previous periods should be mentioned. Calculated for ten-year periods so arranged as to group the worst years of the Depression together, the average of the yearly percentages is as follows. (18)

1850-57	4.3
1858-67	5.3
1868-77	3.5
1878-87	6.7
1888-97	4.6

But Marshall was probably thinking in terms of such an average when, to general astonishment and despite the evidence of the

17. Lord Beveridge: Full Employment in a Free Society, 21 126-8.
18. Layton and Crowther, 265.

figures, he told the Royal Commission on Gold and Silver of 1888 that there had been no more unemployment over the last decade than in any previous ten years of the century. Among later observers, Clapham at least thought he was probably right, observing that "Statistical certainty was, and remains, impossible." (19) On the other hand, although there were those who argued from the decrease in the proportion of the population receiving poor law relief (5.1% for 1875-84 compared with 4.7% 1855-64 and 4.4% 1865-74) (20) that there were actually fewer workers unemployed in this Depression decade than previously, it has also been claimed with some justification that this decrease was due more than anything else to increased strictness in applying the regulations. It is very doubtful, to say the least, that these figures can be used at all as a measure of unemployment or even of the extent of poverty. Unionists also pointed out that more workers than previously were receiving out-of-work benefit by this time from their trade unions, which meant that they were taken off the hands of the poor law authorities.

In general, we must agree with Clapham that no certainty is possible as to the degree of unemployment in the Great Depression.

17. Clapham, op cit., II, 455-6, quoting Royal Commission on Gold and Silver 1888, Evidence, 9823 (Official title was "R.O. on Recent Changes in the Relative Values of the Precious Metals.")

20. Royal Commission on Depression of Trade 1886, First Report, Table 44. The figures are for those unions in England and Wales.

Another set of figures which may be held to give some indication of the condition of the workers during the Depression is Wood's index of the average consumption per head of population of a group of common foodstuffs, a quantitative measurement which eliminates the factor of changes in retail prices. This shows a small decline for the depression years, but always remains well above the level of the sixties, when there had been a general rise from about 75 to 90 and an average for the decade of only 81.1. (21)

1875	104.0	1882	105.3
1876	105.0	1883	105.0
1877	102.3	1884	104.5
1878	101.6	1885	101.5
1879	98.8	1886	101.5
1880	101.8	1887	104.0
1881	103.8	1888	104.5
		1889	108.7

(Base: average
of 1870-79=100)

When the facts that these figures cover the whole population and that they are largely for necessaries - which would be the last group of expenditures to be economised, are taken into consideration, they seem to imply a noticeable temporary decline in real earnings for the workers. Any reduction in the consumption of necessaries would ^{surely be due to distress on the part of the} ~~surely be made by the~~ working class. But they also show that the average level of real income always remained very much higher than in the sixties and earlier years.

Although they did attempt to make allowance for unemployment, there was one important factor noticed previously which

the statisticians admit they could not take into account - the amount of "short-time" worked. And, despite the fact that this method of reducing production was becoming less used with the advance of industrialisation, which made it more difficult because of the need to preserve factory routine, it seems to have been still so widespread in the period of the Depression as to be of very marked importance. Neither its extent, of course, or to the degree to which working time was reduced can be estimated with anything like mathematical precision, but an indication is available from the reports sent by trade unions to the Royal Commission on the Depression of Trade. The general impression these give is that the Depression was very real to a great many of the workers. (22)

Only 276 unions sent in replies to the Commission's questionnaire - a mere handful, and many of these were branches of national bodies. For instance, there were 30 replies from Engineers' branches, 32 from Ironfounders, 11 from Boilermakers 20 from Coachmakers, 31 from Printers, and 87 from branches of various building trade organisations. Some of these unions reported that conditions were not depressed; there was variation between districts, even for the same trade, and the printers particularly were experiencing the stimulating effects of the general election campaign. There was even the odd

22. These replies are collected and indexed in Appendix to Second Report, Part II.

union or two which gave a general verdict that their trade was not depressed while reporting that a high proportion of the members were out of work. Newcastle-on-Tyne Amalgamated Carpenters and Joiners for instance, with 100 out of 400 unemployed, thought trade "rather dull at present"(!), the Cheltenham Operative Bricklayers, with 50 out of 150 tradesmen and 300 of 600 labourers out of work, thought it "slightly depressed." But these bodies were all builders' unions and as the returns were made in the winter of 1885-6, such figures seem to have been accepted as normal seasonal unemployment. (The fact that such instability could be accepted in this way is perhaps significant; such an attitude certainly left ample room for increased ambition.)

Worst hit, of course, were the Boilermakers and other metal workers. With 500 out of a thousand tradesmen unemployed, the Hartlepool Boilermakers reported that they were "on the verge of starvation", and the usual reply from this group was that conditions were "very bad", or "very bad indeed". But the Edinburgh Trades Council, representing 20 unions, reported that depression was general "with scarcely an exception", and the answers from many unions in other trades make just as gloomy reading. Shewsbury Amalgamated Carpenters reported: "There is a great many families starving".

But the feature of the replies most significant for present purposes was probably the frequent reference to

short-time working and to earnings below the standard rates. For instance, the Edinburgh Trades Council report already cited went on to state that the wages actually being earned were much less than the recognised rates, the true average being only about 22/- a week. The Sunderland branch of the AERS reported no unemployment, but a great deal of short time; the Preston Carpenters spoke of "low wages, work difficult to obtain, consequently operatives taking contracts for ruinous prices in order to obtain food. These again employing unskilled labour at still lower wages, thus closing the market to skilled labour." The Gold and Silver Metal Beaters returned 600 adults out of 1200 out of work, the rest being "partially employed." The Hyde branch of the General Carpenters and Joiners: "So many working under the standard wages through being unskilled, and trade being so bad they are working at prices from 4½d. per hour to 7½d. per hour." Five men used to be employed to one apprentice, the same report continued, but these figures were now reversed; there was no longer a formal apprenticeship system, and when youths had served their time they were not given certificates but were offered work at 10/- less than the standard rate. From the General Union head office at Manchester, the Secretary reported that trade was "fearfully depressed", not half the men getting the standard wage. "They prefer young men and improvers. A good honest tradesman is thought nothing of at the present time." The Sock and Top operatives of Leicestershire had

had 700 unemployed of 1500 members, the rest working part time. Of the Boot and Shoe Makers, both Aberdare and Farnworth (both small branches) were working only half the week, and a six months training had replaced the previous seven years apprenticeship. The Buckhurst Hill branch of the Amalgamated Carpenters: "Many men take piece work at very low rates, rates at which they cannot make average wages, and will work long hours for the purpose merely to be their own masters"; the Liverpool branch ".....as soon as they (the apprentices) are able to do a day's work the journeyman workman is not recognised any more." The Grantham Wheelwrights and Blacksmiths were working only $4\frac{1}{2}$ days a week. Little more than half of the Barrow-in-Furness Shipwrights were employed, and they were working only about three-quarters of the week; according to the Edinburgh Associated Blacksmiths, men were doing blacksmiths' work in that city for 15/- a week - less than half the standard rate. These are only a fraction of the references. Moreover, many instances are given of apprentices' wages being greatly increased from the former nominal payment to what could be regarded, if very low, as a wage - a further indication of the general tendency to employ less skilled labour. On the other hand, there are a few complaints of overtime being worked in the midst of unemployment. And in addition there are frequent explanations that the figures for unemployment are low because large

numbers of men have left the districts concerned.

As these replies cover only parts of the field of unionism, and are not suited for any systematic or statistical treatment, they can hardly be said to give complete evidence of the state of the workers during the Depression. But they do seem to show that in very many cases the workers did suffer severely, and that they suffered more than the indices of wages and prices would seem to indicate, particularly because they reveal that in many cases the standard rates of wages on which the indices are based were the exception as much as the rule.

One instance for which the evidence is reasonably substantial is the case of the carpenters, who are represented in these replies, and whose complaints that work was being done for less than standard rates are very frequent and insistent. Yet the index figures record a decline in builders' earnings of only three points!

Although the statisticians based their figures on the recognised standard rates, they endeavoured wherever possible to check these against the wages that were actually being paid. But a study of their explanations of method and their own frequent confessions of inadequacy (23) gives the impression that their corrections may often have been insufficient. One of their best guides, the wage census of 1886, gave merely the

23. Mainly in Journal of R.Stat. Soc. 1898-1910.

earnings for a certain single week. Wood specifically cites the evidence of Lord before the Royal Commission of 1886 as one of his authorities; it would appear from this that he made no use of the trade union replies, which are not precise enough for his purpose in any case. While their figures probably become more accurate as they enter the nineties, approaching the time when the investigators were actually at work, it seems likely that they are not very reliable for the trough of the Depression. Bowley certainly admits that his figures are not very precise before 1880; (24) but can they have been much better for 1885-6?

Further than this it is difficult to go, except to add that this finding confirms the evidence of the actual decay of the unions. If the workers had to accept considerably lower earnings than the statistics suggest and if short time, which the statisticians had to ignore, was as common as these replies tend to indicate, it becomes possible to understand the disintegration of unionism.

Nevertheless, if it becomes possible to suspect that a real decline, during the Depression, in material standards of living was a motivating force for the new militancy, it probably remains true that actual poverty itself can hardly have been among the origins. Comparison with earlier decades

24. Wages and Income since 1860, XIII.

of the century seems to show that most of the workers had often suffered much worse before and since Chartism. It was probably a comparison of the Depression years with the relatively high standards they had come by that time to accept as their due lot that was the important influence in so far as wages and security of employment were concerned. And the workers do seem to have paid more attention to money wages than to real earnings.

As will be seen in later chapters, the timing of the new movement suggests definite connections with the fluctuations of trade. As already noticed, in the prosperous first half of the seventies, which itself followed upon the bad years of 1868-9, there were unmistakable signs of growing militancy which was cut short by the first sharp onset of the Depression that destroyed many of the unions and forced the rest into inertness. Discontent began to show itself again by 1885, and then the return of temporary prosperity made possible the upsurge of "new unionism" in 1889-90. This helped to awaken further ambition, and next the recession of 1891-5, severe but not enough to cripple the unions, seems to coincide with the conversion of a considerable section of the workers to a desire for more vigorous industrial and political action. Moreover the eight hours movement of this period, a prominent symptom of the new militancy, had as one of its prime motives the reduction of the prevalent unemployment. Although

crippling the workers in its worst phases, the Depression seems to have goaded them to action as soon as action became practicable. Even so, the Depression seems to have been even more influential as a result of another of its effects - the intensification of work. It was not merely the cruel hardship of ^{the} unemployment of the seventies and eighties that made it the primary urgent moral force of the eight hours movement - the privations of the workless seemed much more inhuman and senseless beside the greatly increased output that was being remorselessly pressed from those who were still working.

(c) The Position of the Workers in the Changing Economy.

Apart from tariffs, which most of them were uneasy about because of the possible danger of repercussions and which they knew to be almost impossible politically, the employers could see only one solution to the problem of low prices and foreign competition: cheaper production - reduced labour costs. Very often this meant little more than the exaction of more production from their employees by mere increased pressure. Although it is true on the one hand that Britain passed through a second stage of the Industrial Revolution at this time, which was itself primary in importance in its disciplinary effects on the workers, it is also true on the other that too often Britain remained behind other nations in technical progress, with conservative managements apparently trying to make up the leeway of their competitors by sheer driving at a faster pace. (1) (It is quite true also, of course, that workers were very frequently as conservative and complacent as employers, quite as ready, as their evidence before the Royal Commission of 1886 shows, (2) to substitute rhetoric about British supremacy for study of improved methods.)

-
1. See also the authorities in note (5) in previous section.
 2. See replies from unions; also G.C.Allen; *The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country*, 189; and Shadwell; *Industrial Efficiency II*, 50-1.

Many of the statements already quoted from the replies of the unions to the Commission's questionnaire have given instances of the methods adopted to this end by the employers, and the workers' reaction to them. And there were many more similar devices. Increasing the proportion of apprentices, disregarding apprenticeship practices and employing youths who had only partially completed their training at less wages than were paid to recognised journeymen - such changes are quite common. In the process of speeding up, quality was often neglected - a blow to the men's self-respect. "Quality no object, quantity the order", said the Hammersmith Amalgamated Carpenters; "a degree of discipline unknown to the workers of twenty years ago", the Amalgamated Cotton Spinners. The Show Card and Blowing Room workers told of men looking after six machines instead of the previous four, 300 spindles in place of the previous 240, and so on; and according to the Journeymen Hatters, "employers want twice as much work for the same money". "It is disgraceful to see some work turned off the bench", said the Secretary of the General Carpenters. "The order of the day is now "get it out", irrespective of how it is done". The gilders estimated the speed-up at about 100%; Even the Thames Watermen thought they were being much harder worked. "There is no decrease in the rate of production per head", the Tedmerden Iron-founders replied to one of the questions, "it is run, run, be

sharp, be sharp and so forth". The Glasgow Iron Moulders drew their own conclusion. According to their testimony, "Everything now wanted is in such (post haste hurry) that men in our trades are compelled to do (per day) now what in many cases took from (2 till 3 days) some years ago to accomplish" (brackets sic). Yet at least 40% of their men were out of work and "now in Glasgow we have thousands going idle and families near to starvation"; "in too many instances (men) are treated without the consideration that should be cultivated between employer and employed." The Neath Engineers referred to the "mania for cheapness... employers want excessive profits;" the Boston Amalgamated Carpenters put the same thought: "If capitalists would only be satisfied with a fair percentage and not be so greedy, we might get on a little better." The stress is constantly on the apparent inhumanity of what was happening: The Nottingham Amalgamated Carpenters thought that in reducing wages by "alleging that others would work for less" the employers were "taking a mean advantage of those that were employed." Similarly, the Hammersmith Carpenters were of the opinion that wage reductions "vary according to the grinding nature of employers and the pliability of employees". And frequently the unionists supported this diagnosis of unfairness with allegations of scamping, of "unscrupulous and grasping builders who...construct the buildings with the cheapest and of course

the worst material", "jerry-building.....unjust.....to the purchaser," houses that were "only shams", and so on, the London Stonemasons actually charging their masters with "quite a common practice" of using cheaper stone than was specified.

Not all of this new pressure, of course, was the result of the Depression: much of it was, but a good deal was also its cause. The fall in prices was due not only to the competition of newly industrialised foreign countries, but also to the further industrialisation of British manufacture. Unfortunately, economic historians have as yet given very little attention to the details of this development, but its main outlines at least are visible. Many industries were only now passing over into large-scale, more closely organised production with its new disciplinary requirements. Boot-making is one well-known example of this development at this time; (3) and J.B.Jeffreys has traced its ~~very~~ gradual, delayed and uneven spread through engineering. (4) The process has also been shown in iron and steel, (5) and for the backward, untypical "Black Country" by G.C.Allen, (6) but as yet comparatively few industries have been methodically examined for this period.

3. British Industries under Free Trade, 236ff. (H.Cox, ed),

4. The Story of the Engineers.

5. D.L.Burns: The Economic History of Steel-making; Burnham and Hoskins; Iron and Steel in England 1870-1930.

6. ~~op. cit.~~ The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country.

One indication of how late the introduction of factory disciplines had been delayed in many industries is the survival of the tradition of "St.Monday" and "St.Tuesday", the two days every week when little or no work was attempted. In the sixties, the stonemason's yard where Broadhurst worked was idle every Monday. (7) About 1868, when Will Crooks completed his time as a cooper's apprentice, the men in his shop devoted a whole day to a traditional ceremony of initiation which the employers were unsuccessfully attempting to stamp out. (8) In many of the Birmingham trades factory organisation had just begun to appear before the onset of the Depression, and the workers were still in the process of resigning themselves to the loss of these two idle days. (9) In Sheffield, where the small industries formed a similar group, Monday was still almost a complete holiday at this time, and Tuesday was almost as bad, the excuse that this was necessary for the repairing of machinery being specifically contradicted by the United States consul. Although by no means unpractised, the Monday holiday had almost disappeared in Manchester and Tuesday was no longer observed at all; Liverpool had reached the stage

7. H. Broadhurst; From Stonemason's Bench to Treasury Bench.

8. G. Haw; From Workhouse to Westminster -- the Life Story of Will Crooks, 40.

9. C.C. Allen; op. cit., 166. P. de Roussiers (The Labour Question in Britain, 4ff), found "St.Monday" and "St.Tuesday" being still observed in Birmingham trades in 1896.

of working on both Monday and Tuesday. As might be expected, survival was most noticeable in the more backward trades. In addition to the examples of Birmingham and Sheffield, there was the brickmaking in the Cambridgeshire fens -- probably the most primitive of all industries at this time -- where the week's work was still not resumed until Wednesday. (The brickworkers did not know even the names of the surrounding districts, their whole existence being bounded by work and drink.) (10)

Even in the nineties, D.F.Schless found that,

although they were in their places, the workers in many

piece-work trades did as little as possible for the first two days of the week, cramming all their real effort into the second half. (He found too that subcontract was common at that time in a very wide range of industries: clothing,

bootmaking, iron -- he discovered the system in every department of one iron-works employing 10,000 men, mining, quarrying, ship-building, the manufacture of agricultural implements, all branches of building, cement-making, match-making and cotton spinning.) (11) The term "St. Monday" was still in use among bootmakers in the nineties. (12)

10. E.Young: Labour in Europe and America, 333, 409, 412, 406.

11. Methods of Industrial Remuneration, 29-30, 119.

12. The Workers' Cry, August 9, 1891; "Most cobblers hold Monday as a sort of sacred day. Well, they don't profess to do any work, and some wag put it in the crowdwainer's calendar as Saint Monday, rest his soul." See also Shadwell II, 286.

And even in the transition from iron to steel in Cleveland in the latter half of the eighties there was difficulty in forcing the workers, many of whom had come direct from the land, to accept the readjustment. They did not seem to have lost the tradition of spasmodic work associated with handicraft industry,-- "a tradition which puddling might nurture, and which rolling might tolerate if the plant were primitive." (13)

A further indication of the delayed advance of industrialisation is the fact that the Census authorities in 1891 found it necessary to draw up a new and greatly enlarged dictionary of occupations, owing to the greatly increased specialisation and diversification. (14) One writer summarises in these terms:

"It was not until well into the last half of the nineteenth century that large-scale factory work became characteristic, if even that, and highly mechanised. . . .not until the last quarter of the century did the working class begin to assume the character of a factory proletariat. Prior to this, the majority of the workers retained the marks of the earlier period of capitalism, alike in their habits and interests, the nature of the employment relation and the circumstances of their exploitation." (15)

In his careful study, "Increasing Return", G.T.Jones attempted a quantitative measurement of the increase in

13. D.L.Burns: op. cit., 147.

14. 1891 Census, General Report, 26.

15. M.Lobb: Studies in the Development of Capitalism, 265.

productivity over this period in a representative group of industries. For carpenters and joiners he estimated an increase of nearly 60% between 1850 and 1910, four-fifths of this amount being due to the introduction of machinery into joiners' shops, particularly in the seventies and eighties. This was facilitated by the growth at this time of specialised joinery firms concentrating on the mass-production of ready-made fittings. For masonry, his index figure of "real costs" declined from 111 in 1850 to 91 in 1900, this rise in productivity being achieved largely by the use of machinery for cutting and manipulating stone, much of the shaping being now done to order at the quarry. (16)

Similarly there was a decline in the real costs of roofing from 110 in 1850 to 88 in 1890, attributed largely to specialisation in this work by various firms. Productivity in bricklaying increased ten percent from 1850 to 1900, partly because of new techniques in cementing; and in plastering from 116 to 97, due "in part to improvements in the range of cements and plasters....in part to improved technique of master and man." Significantly, he mentions that some of these gains in productivity were lost, especially in the nineties and later, through "truculence" on the part of the workers. Thus his weighted average for real costs in the whole building

industry shows a decline of only 17% from 1850 to 1910, practically all of this gain being accounted for by the use of machinery for joinery.

On the other hand the textile industry, which had passed into the factory stage long ago, went through a further stage of acceleration and increased discipline. "Improvements, such as increasing the number and speed of spindles in the mule, the invention of automatic devices enabling the weaver to mind ever more looms and the speeding up of looms, have been taking place continually." (17) Ring-spinning particularly was a new device widely adopted in the seventies and eighties. Comparing the years 1859-61 with 1880-2, Kuczynski estimates that although the number of hours worked in the week decreased from 87 to 82, the average yearly output of cotton yarns for each operative rose in the proportion of 615 to 775, the figures for output per hour being 708:948. (The base for his index is 1829-31=100 -- thus this last figure shows a nine-fold increase over 50 years, actually taking place since the time when the industrial revolution was generally supposed to have been almost completed for cotton.) (18)

17. Ibid., 118.

18. Kuczynski; Short History, 46. These figures are probably acceptable, for later years at least, as the data is readily available.

In pig-iron manufacture, the average output for furnaces in blast in the Cleveland district increased from 23,500 tons in 1883 to 27,600 tons in 1889, mainly because of technical improvements but without any increase in the numbers employed in the industry. (19) And the changeover from iron to steel involved the use of larger-scale plant and mechanical handling equipment that, while it eliminated much of the unpleasantness of the old manual manipulation associated with puddling, also meant on the other hand an increased degree of labour discipline. (20)

Another dehumanising effect of the new pressure was told to the Royal Commission on Labour of 1893: "Some firms, and these the largest, make it a rule never to employ men over forty.....if they can possibly help it." (21)

It is impossible, of course, to estimate the extent to which the generally increased volume of production (22) was the

19. Jones, 127-44.

20. Burn, 144.

21. Third Report, XXXII, 59.

22. As a measure of this speeding-up tendency for industry as a whole, Kuczynski gives an index figure of industrial production per head of wage-earners. Calculated to a base of 1900=100, it moves as follows:

1859-68	51
1869-79	66
1880-83	83
1887-95	96
1896-1903	105

While, as usual, Kuczynski gives no adequate explanation of how this figure was calculated, its general trend at least seems to accord reasonably well with other estimates, for instance with D.A. Wells, Recent Economic Changes, 28, 51ff.

result of greater effort obtained from the workers, compared with the degree to which it was achieved by improved machinery and methods which required no extra exertion on their part. Undoubtedly both factors were important; speeding-up took place apart from mechanisation and in addition to it. This point, it will be remembered, was particularly stressed in the replies of the unions to the questionnaire of the Royal Commission on the Depression of Trade. A large number of these were from building workers and, as was also noticed above, Jones found statistical evidence of extra exertion in the building industry. (He also found, however, that the average productivity of the building workers declined in the nineties - possibly this was due in part to the remarkable expansion of the industry, the number of workers increasing 35% from 1891-1910). Apart from the question of effort, some unpleasant work was eliminated by mechanisation, some unpleasant new tasks were introduced: on the whole, there was probably neither gain nor loss in this respect. (23) There can be no doubt, however, that even where machinery superseded manual work and various devices enabled the worker to achieve a greater output than had been possible previously, its introduction led to a new intensity and discipline. The worker's speed was decided for him. In many industries craftsmanship became less important, the workman thus being deprived of some self-respect and creative satisfaction,

narrow specialisation and routine taking its place. And, there was marked resistance to this process on the part of the workers, as is evident from the replies to the Commission on the Depression. As Schloss pointed out, although the workers were genuinely distressed at the decay of craftsmanship, they were very often, as if by nature, culpably negligent about output. This was not merely an expression of a belief that they should be paid in proportion to output, as the Webbs seem to have thought; (24) even under piece-rates, the Lancashire textile operatives greatly speeded up their production as a holiday approached in order to have more to spend. "A fair day's work" seemed to mean an output considerably below the possible maximum; it was this type of prejudice, frequently disguised by elaborate rationalisation, that often lay behind the opposition to the new economic order. (25)

With the new emphasis on system and standardisation and the increased capitalisation made necessary by the new methods the outworkers, who had at least preserved a prized degree of independence even if their bargaining position was weaker than that of factory employees, steadily disappeared from the various industries where they had still lingered, except from a handful of backward trades. Where they remained, they too were subjected to the new pressure, in the form of

24. Industrial Democracy, 282-3 for example.

25. Methods of Industrial Remuneration, 13, 42-4, See also Shadwell; Industrial Efficiency II, 333; Burn, 147.

the "sweating system". Its departure suddenly accelerated by the stimulus of the Depression, the old, easy-going time when Britain was pioneering the industrial revolution and monopolising world markets was passing away.

Accompanying this tendency and accentuating its effects was a growth in the size of the average firm which further dehumanised economic relationships. In its turn this development was facilitated and its impersonalising effects still further aggravated by the adoption of joint stock organisation following the passing of the Act of 1862 that conceded limited liability. The Royal Commission of 1886 noted, for instance, the appearance of the new "promoters" who launched a company only in order to sell its shares at a profit. (26)

By 1885 only between 5 and 10% of the 100,000 or so important businesses in the country had adopted limited liability, with a proportion of about 30% for the industries - shipping, iron and steel, and cotton-in which a large capital was necessary; but by about 1895 these firms were in the great majority in this group of industries, and by 1914 limited liability had conquered British industry almost completely. (27)

Although it was the private company that became the typical firm, and thus businesses remained in the

26. Majority Report, XVIII

27. J.B. Jeffreys: Trends in Business Organisation in Great Britain since 1856 (unpublished thesis in the University of London, 1938), Chs. II and III.

the hands of families, managers accepted new responsibilities for shareholders and could give less consideration to the interests of their employees. And the device of the private company also enabled family firms to expand to keep pace with the growing scale of industry. (28) In many cases second generation owners preferred to forsake active partnerships for the greater ease of a director's chair. (29) "Personal livelihood was becoming larger-scale, impersonal profit-taking"; is one writer's description of the process, "business was hardening into finance capitalism." (30) There was as yet no appearance of "trusts" in the American sense of the term, such as would seriously menace the "free enterprise" basis of the economy. Except for the treatise of the Fabian H.W. McCrosty, "The Trust Movement in British Industry", published in 1901, which contained some startling revelations of United States developments but little that was at all spectacular of Britain, one finds no reference in the Labour movement to the growth of monopoly until the first decade of the new century. The question of the trade federation of the nineties - such as the Shipowners' Federation - is a different matter, since they were formed after the new spirit had appeared in the unions, for the specific purpose of crushing it. Certainly the growth in the size of the average firm made it

28. Clapham II, 447.

29. Jeffreys, 73; D.L.Burn, 300ff; G.C.Allen, 355-6.

30. H.Lynd; England in the Eighteen-Eighties, 28.

even more difficult for workers to set up as employers for themselves; but in almost all the important industries this had long been virtually impossible in any case. (The question of the disappearance of outworkers and sub-contractors is of course rather a different point.)

Trade associations had been common in the British economy long before 1850. After almost disappearing in the expansive third quarter of the century, they began to reappear in the fourth, but were organised mainly for price-fixing purposes, and thus had little effect on the environment of the workers, unless perhaps to mitigate a little for the wage-earners the severity of the competition that had revived them. But in any case they were ineffective and seldom endured for long; the workers felt the pressure of competition severely enough despite them; and their revival is a further testimony to its intensity. In mining, textiles, and metal-working, where associations were formed largely for the purpose of concerting negotiations with the unions, the resulting formalisation of collective bargaining may have aided the expansion of unionism in those trades. (31)

To summarise the findings of this chapter; it seems evident that the material standard of living of the workers was higher in the eighties than it had been in any previous decade of the century. Hours were shorter in most industries;

31. Clapham II, 145-53 ; III, 212-220, 301-17.

working conditions were better; real and money wages were much higher; the standard of living of the artisans was moderately comfortable. The situation of the unskilled workers was rather different from that of the artisans, although they had participated in the general long-term rise in real earnings, their advance had not equalled the gain of the craftsmen, and their money wages had in fact fallen markedly since the peak years of the seventies. (Because of the simultaneous decline in retail prices even in the worst years of the slump their real wages scarcely declined.) And for all the long-term increase in their real earnings, their material standard of living was still deplorable. Although the general index figures show little effect of the Great Depression, a large proportion of the workers had suffered severely in unemployment and under-employment, and it seems likely that in many cases earnings did fall much further than the figures indicate for those workers who stayed in work.

But the main effect of the Depression and to a certain extent -- as many of the workers themselves crudely realised -- its cause, was a sudden acceleration of the long-term process of speeding-up and further industrialisation. In fact it seems that this was the event in the economic history of the period most significant for any attempt to explain the changed attitude of the workers, and the development which, together with the remarkable increase in real earnings, was most

completely different from all that had occurred before. By way of contrast, the survival of "what are commonly called patriarchal relations" in the woollen and worsted industries was to a large extent, but not entirely, responsible for the failure of unionism to advance in these trades. Clapham found that -

"in some of the old family businesses strikes are unknown.... In the country mills especially, the old relations of employer and employed survive, and the unions make little headway." (32)

(Hand-loom weavers were still an important class in Yorkshire as late as 1875, and a good deal of work was still sent out to the villages many years later; the hand-loom trade was, almost but not entirely, extinct by 1901.) The same sort of consideration applied apparently to the potters, who seemed to start and stop their work and determine their methods "much as they pleased", (33) and who also took little part in the spread of unionism. (Even so, the new intensity was only relative; in 1901 an American rolling-mill expert told the British steel-producers that although they worked under competitive conditions, they did not really compete - there was no drive in the management of the industry. And even today the visitor quickly detects an easy-going, conservative

32. Clapham; The Woollen and Worsted Industries, 207.

33. Clapham; Economic History III, 109.

atmosphere which seems a relic of less challenging days.) (34).

In relating these facts of the changing economy to the development of the new spirit within trade unionism, previous writers have usually stressed the declining importance of craftsmanship -- the new threat of competition that the skilled workers had to face from the unskilled -- as a major factor in the growth of the new attitudes. It has been argued that the bargaining strength of the craftsmen was greatly weakened, and that they were forced to ally themselves with the labourers to a much greater extent. Undoubtedly this decay of craftsmanship was of considerable importance; the disappearance of apprenticeship was one of the most striking features of the economic revolution of the second half of the century. Although most of the craft unions still included elaborate apprenticeship provisions in their rules in the nineties, these had become meaningless survivals by that time, unobserved in practice. But the present writer's opinion is that the importance of this development has been considerably over-emphasised.

34. Burn, 300. Chadwell was astounded to find in the early twentieth century that English manufacturers left their mills to go grouse shooting. (Industrial Efficiency II, 453). Quoting similar views from other foresters in sport he thought the whole nation was more interested in sport than production. One very prominent British manufacturer told him that the "greater part" of the decline in Britain's trading position had been "the fault of the manufacturer himself; he has been too supine and easy-going". (p331).

The death agonies of apprenticeship, which after all was largely a medieval institution, hardly suited as a method of technical instruction to the demands of industrialisation, had been well advanced some time previously. The system had rarely been effectively observed when it did not suit the employers' interests; few unions were ever able to enforce a limitation of the number of apprentices; and limitation had never proved an effective industrial weapon for them. Moreover the success of the cotton spinners, who had no apprenticeship system and permitted entry into their trade to as many of the much more numerous piecers as could persuade the employers to entrust them with a mule, also seems to demonstrate that the institution contributed relatively little to the strength of the craft societies. The plumbers were a similar case, recruiting as they pleased from among their "mates", yet effectively maintaining their standard rate. (35)

On the other hand, skill was still to be a powerful bargaining asset in the twentieth century. The craft unions did not open their ranks to the unskilled -- as is often erroneously thought. They did relax their rigid standards of entry, but only slightly, and the branches usually ignored the relaxed provisions in practice. Yet they

35. Webber: Industrial Democracy, 453ff. P. de Roussiers: The Labour Question in Britain, 69-72, contradicts the Webbs in their account of the plumbers, but his sources seem much less satisfactory.

suffered little or no diminution of what power they possessed. Partly at least this was due to the fact that mechanisation developed gradually and rather unevenly. In their great lock-out of 1897 the ASE were defeated not primarily because their position had been undermined by mechanisation but because they had no clear policy and failed to put their case effectively, and because their ambition had outrun their bargaining strength. Their industrial power had not diminished to any marked extent; it had never been greatly effective, and the caution of their leaders in previous years had been due much less to timidity than to discretion. (36)

One of the modern features of this development of the increasing importance of the semi-skilled in the economy has been the narrowing difference between rates of pay for skilled and unskilled workers. But Bowley's figures appear to show no trace of this change in the 1860-1900 period - on the contrary, the position of the unskilled seems to have worsened. Certainly one notable change of this type ^{that} did occur - the substitution of an actual wage for a merely nominal payment for young workers as a result of the decay of apprenticeship - would have no effect on Bowley's tables, which are concerned with adult wage earners. Emphasis has also frequently been placed in discussions of unionism in

36. The points in the second half of this paragraph depend upon the later detailed treatment of individual unions.

this period upon the decline in practices such as subcontracting, but there seems to be no strong evidence of any kind that the difference this caused in ^{the} relations between groups of workers had of itself any marked effect on the development of unionism. It was, of course, a further indication of the spread of factory organization; but other ^{characteristics} of the factory system seem to have been more influential

There can be little doubt that the disappearance of apprenticeship and the industrial change that lay behind this development was a factor of some significance in altering the tone of unionism, but its importance can be and has often been over-stressed. In particular, since they come from a partisan source, the statements of "new unionists" such as John Burns have to be treated very cautiously.

If the decay of craftsmanship did serve to some extent to foster the development of a new kind of unionism with a new philosophy, the whole event of further industrialisation also provided a different, more important motivation, heightening the old, perpetual antagonism of trade unionism towards profit-motive capitalism into a new urgency. The chief ^{economic} stimulus to this change was ^{apparently} the new atmosphere of disciplined intensity that descended over production. From the viewpoint of the workers, who -- as will be seen more fully in the following chapter -- had now achieved enough comfort and decency to nourish further ambitions, the economy had suddenly become much more materialistic and dehumanised.

CHAPTER 5.
SOCIAL CHANGE.

The well-being of the workers was not merely a matter of real wages or of the conditions under which wages were earned. It involved the whole of their social life - housing, education, facilities for recreation, religious satisfaction, opportunities for raising a family at the level of the desired standards, and so on. An examination of this side of the workers' conditions in the eighties and nineties is necessary in any attempt to account for the growing discontent among the working-class of that period. (The question of developments in religious life will be treated separately in a later chapter).

Firstly, the question of housing. Here again, as with real wages, there arises a chorus of agreement that the situation was much better than it had been in the earlier decades of the century. The inhumanity of the almost unbridled ⁴⁵laissez-faire that had governed the provision of workers' dwellings in the earlier stages of the industrial revolution had been realised: cheapness was no longer recognised as the criterion. And, following this movement of opinion, material results had been achieved: before the Royal Commission on Housing of 1884-5(1) (itself a witness

1. Report XXX, 4.

of the new concern for these matters), Shaftesbury was able to speak of an "enormous improvement in housing and sanitation over the last thirty years." Techniques of sanitation and drainage were no longer woefully inadequate as they had been in the forties, and a great deal of the early leeway had been made up, although there were still difficulties in some cities in the eighties, especially where rivers were involved. (2) The death rate in English cities had been improved to a point much lower than the figure for practically all of the Continent, but it was still high enough: 40 per 1000 for Clare Market and the rest of the worst areas in London, rather worse in Newcastle, Sheffield, Leeds and Leicester, much worse in Manchester, Glasgow and Liverpool. (3)

Slum clearance was under way by the eighties in many of the worst cities, such as Birmingham, but it had still only scratched the surface of the problem. Apart from the expense and complexity of the long task of clearing away the mess of the thirties and forties, obstructive opposition still had to be fought on the city councils after Labour members appeared. Despite accelerated progress, the very bulk of the work to be done still remained appalling, well

2. Clapham, II, 444-5.

3. Ibid., 445-6.

into the twentieth century - what must the position have been at this earlier period?⁽⁴⁾ The census gives one indication: adopting a minimum of two persons to a room as their standard, the Census authorities in 1891 found 11% of the population of England and Wales to be overcrowded. The figure was about 20% for London, Huddersfield, Bradford and Halifax; Sheffield and Leeds were better, Manchester much better than this. In the north, where the tradition of the two-room house was strong, the percentage was much worse: Sunderland 42%, Newcastle 35%, Gateshead 40%. The Scottish authorities prudently avoided the 2-to-a-room standard: it would have made their returns startling. There were 14,000 one-room houses in Edinburgh, 5,000 with a second room that had no window. A quarter of the population of Glasgow lived in one-room houses or tenements; in Bridgeton only 882 of 8946 families had more than two rooms with windows, in Lanarkshire only a quarter of 176,000 families.⁽⁵⁾

Certainly these one-room houses were the custom in the north, and the rooms were often large. But some workers were beginning to resent them, if they had not done

4. Shadwell (II, 208) stated in 1906 that an immense amount of work had been achieved in slum clearance over the previous 10-15 years, some towns having been "transformed". His investigations seem to have been thorough. Conditions must therefore have been rather bad before 1890.

5. Clapham, 445-6.

so before: why otherwise did Hardie dryly tell of his experience with Henry George who, on a visit to a Scottish miner's cottage, asked the young wife where she would find space in her single room as her family increased, only to be dumbfounded by the quiet reply that then she would have to take in a boarder to help meet the extra expense. (6) If one-room houses were the custom in the north, they were far from unknown in other parts of the country too, and there were frequent cases of adult families, and even boarders, sharing the same bed. Victorian prudery concealed the natural consequences for many years; but both Beatrice Webb and Margaret Bondfield have recorded the fact that they worked among girls where pregnancies to brothers and fathers were so common as to be almost unheeded, unless in a coarse jest. (7)

Decency of any sort was hardly possible under these conditions. In fact these workers were demoralised

6. Hamilton Fyfe: Keir Hardie, 29.

7. B. Webb: My Apprenticeship; M. Bondfield: A Life's Work, 41 (writing of 1910). Charles Kingsley had written of similar conditions in the rural villages of the sixties:

"We quarrelled like brutes, and who wonders?"

What self-respect could we keep? ...

Our daughters with base-born babies

Have wandered away in their shame;

If your misses had slept, squire, where they did,

Your misses might do the same."

("The Country Parson to the Squire" -- quoted in the Trade Unionist, November 7, 1891).

practically to the point where they lost all self-respect. But although the housing of this submerged class attracted the close attention of the Labour spokesmen and provided good ammunition for their condemnation of the existing order, it is hardly representative; and for the very reason that they had lost all morale this class took little active part in the Labour movement. More significant, probably, were the housing conditions of the worker whose attitudes did find expression in the Labour movement -- the artisan, the trade unionist.

It is difficult to draw a typical picture of the home conditions of the artisan of this period. The standard of housing seems to have varied considerably from district to district. Beatrice Webb apparently found the Bacup weavers in Lancashire enjoying fair if frugal comfort;(8) and on the whole this impression seems to be confirmed by the material evidence of the workers' housing of the north-west and Midland cities, in those suburbs which still stand today as they were built over fifty years ago. Moreover, this same evidence seems to testify to a noticeable improvement over previous decades -- greater roominess, and decorative scrolls over the front door. In much of Yorkshire, however, conditions were markedly worse: the endless row upon row

8. My Apprenticeship.

of back-to-back houses in Leeds, many dating from the present century, are surely one of the darkest, most criminal blots upon England.

All the workers' housing of the period, if comfortable enough inside, was, to be sure, incredibly drab and mean in external appearance, judged by modern standards. Is there any evidence that the occupants resented this? Greater London was growing at the rate of over twenty per cent a decade from the fifties to the nineties, and in the latter half of this period the other 19 largest cities were extending even more rapidly. (9) This growth, and the discovery in the case of the north-east iron and steel workers, already mentioned, that a very high proportion had come direct from the countryside; and the same was probably true of many other groups which were never investigated,--indicate that a large number of these town-dwellers were new to urban surroundings. Were they unsettled by this bleak new life, as the Hammonds thought was so of those who crowded into the new industrial cities of the Chartist age? Surely, whatever the inconveniences of the rural cottage, country life had compensations that must have been sadly missed in the town. When he made his first journey to a Trade Union Congress at 30, J. R. Clynes

9. Cole and Postgate: The Common People, 438.

was enraptured with the charm of the countryside, which seemed a faery world, quite beyond the range of his previous experience.(10)

On the other hand, it seems at least equally true and more significant that the great majority of artisans appear to have had little fault to find with their own housing. It was moderately comfortable, and they were untroubled by its ugliness. One careful observer accepted it as common knowledge that, after a first spell of wonderment, the town-dweller soon became ill-at-ease even in the most beautiful countryside.(11) Many British workers today prefer the close neighbourliness of the terraced street to the detached housing of the council estate.

Thorold Rogers remarked in 1885 that the demand for housing reform was coming not from the workers, but from members of the propertied classes.(12) This was not altogether true of the nineties, when Labour politicians were placing slum clearance at the head of their programmes; but even at this time it was the artisans and not the lowest grades of labour who were active in politics. Again it was

10. J. R. Clynes: *Memoirs I*, 65. This was the Plymouth Congress of 1899. He states earlier (p. 37) that in his childhood few workers ever travelled more than about five miles.

11. A. Shadwell: *Industrial Efficiency, I*, 143-5.

12. *Work and Wages*, 71.

a case of the higher-placed workers sponsoring the cause of the lower-placed section of their class. And these lower grades of workers always indignantly denied the fact when told they were living in a slum! (13)

Moreover, just as they seem to have shown no ambition to eat as much meat as their English neighbours (one meat meal a day was the custom in Scotland, compared with three in most of England (14)), so too the Scottish workers, and the working-class of the north-east, appear to have accepted the one or two-room house or tenement as their normal housing condition. Even when they had no real need of the extra money, families that were given larger houses tended, so it has been said, to fill up the extra rooms with boarders. (15) This evidence from another quarter seems to suggest that with housing - as with other components of the standard of living - it was the accustomed conditions that were the workers' own measuring rod. While the working-class would strongly resent any reduction to a lower level, they did not tend to think themselves entitled to any very marked advance.

13. E.g. see G. Lansbury: *My Life*, lll. (An incident in which Quelch was involved).

14. P. de Roussiers: *The Labour Question in Britain*, 20, 173ff. According to de Roussiers, English workmen considered themselves on "short commons" if they were getting fewer than three meat meals a day. The Scottish workman also drank water with his meals, and his furniture was much more simple.

15. *Shadwell*, I, 147.

To summarise - most workers in Britain seemed reasonably satisfied with their own housing: they had vague ambitions, but no really positive grievances.

The further rapid growth of urbanisation played, of course, its own important part in facilitating organised discontent. The larger the unit, the greater the opportunity for group opinion to form, and for social movements to develop. In this respect the process represented another continuation of the early tendencies of the industrial revolution, still far from complete.

What of education? Contemporary references are extremely frequent and very emphatic that a revolution had taken place. But how much of this was fact, how much Victorian myth? Certainly the workers as a class must have been much more literate from the sixties to the end of the century than in the days of the Chartists and far removed from the animalism of the thirties and forties. And for our present purposes this may well be enough to know.

It is difficult to estimate with any accuracy the extent of the improvement from the sixties onwards. It seems likely that the leaders of the national education campaign exaggerated the degree of change. Even in the sixties, it is probable that a higher proportion of working-

class children than has been thought obtained a basic knowledge of reading and writing from such sources as the Sunday Schools, which were largely instituted for that purpose. Nevertheless, the schooling probably became much more adequate in the succeeding decades. Not until 1880, ten years after the passing of Forster's Act, was it possible to make education compulsory. It was estimated by the Census authorities in 1851 that half of the five million children from 5 to 15 years were attending school (16); a Royal Commission of 1886 concluded that 46% of the appropriate age-groups of the population were enrolled at some school in 1870, 92% in 1880, 97% in 1887 (17). Trevelyan gives the figure that the average school attendance, which is probably a better measurement, increased from one and a quarter million in 1870 to four and a half million in 1890. (18) One estimate

-
16. Report, 65. The National Education League figures for 1870 are similar: the League claimed that there were $4\frac{1}{2}$ million children of school age in that year, of whom two million were receiving no schooling, and a further million attended uninspected schools, many of which were conducted by unqualified quacks. Even the quacks probably taught the children to read and write, however, and few really learned much more than this, even after 1870.
17. First Report, 1886, Vol. 35, 254.
18. G. M. Trevelyan: England in the Nineteenth Century and After, 354.

of illiteracy, based on the percentages of those who signed their names in the marriage registers, gives figures of 25% for males, 35% for females in 1861, 20% and 27% for 1870-77; 13% and 16% for 1883, and 11% and 13% for 1888. (19) Although the accuracy of these percentages has been questioned on the ground that for some years many who were literate preferred to make their mark, they probably give an approximate indication of the tendency.

There can be little doubt that there was not only considerable improvement by the seventies compared with the fifties, but also further marked improvement from the seventies to the end of the century. Some general confirmation of this conclusion is obtained from the biographies of labour leaders; and a further indication of the extent of the change is given in the revolution in newspaper reading. (20)

There can be no doubt that, whatever its precise extent, this improvement in the level of education was of fundamental importance for the development of new working-class attitudes, especially when it is remembered that the full effects of educational advance are retarded a generation

19. H. Lynd: *England in the Eighteen-Eighties*, 366, quoting the *Statesman's Year Book*.

20. T. H. S. Escott: *England - its People, Polity and Pursuits*, 182.

or more. It was only too true, as its opponents had said, that education unfitted the workers for their station. Although its effects were not what its advocates had hoped - ability to read did not transform mere man into political philosopher - they were remarkable enough. (On the other hand, the "popular press" had not yet been established, to fatally dull the critical powers of the common reader.) A new generation of workers appeared, with greatly increased self-respect, new faculties, and new ambitions. There was less of the old beastly drunkenness, (21) new dignity, and a revolution in manners. And this social change embodied the emergence of a new conception of human rights that would result in refusal to tolerate state inaction in the face of such indignities as prolonged unemployment.

Although the data is too intangible to permit any real attempt at an answer, the circumstances of Scotland pose a challenging sociological question, and throw an interesting light upon the English developments. Education had long been wide-spread in Scotland; yet at the same time material standards of living were considerably lower than in England. Whether or not this be the net result, Scottish unionism was notoriously apathetic. (And this was despite a tendency for advanced political movements to appear, unconnected with the

21. See especially B. Turner: *About Myself*, 352; *Shadwell II*, 280.

unions - except that occasionally they obtained some support from the unstable miners' organisations.) Were material conditions more influential than the degree of literacy; or was there something in the character of Scottish education which prevented it from awakening ambition? Or were there other cultural forces involved?

Another profound social change occurring at this time, similar in its effects to the spread of literacy, was the substantial reduction of working hours and resulting increase in leisure time. Since the successful agitation of the builders and textile workers in the seventies, "the 54-hour week (had become) as typical of the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century as the 63-hour week had been of the first and second quarters."⁽²²⁾ (The builders could not reduce their summer week to below 61, but worked only 48 hours in the winter). The Saturday half-holiday too had become general. Of course it was mainly the better-organised trades that enjoyed these hours: the unskilled workers who were not fortunate enough to be attached to well-organised trades worked very much longer. The gasworkers, for instance, were on their twelve-hour shift in the eighties; omnibus and cab drivers frequently worked as long or longer; there were very frequent cases of railwaymen working an 80-hour

22. Clapham, II, 449.

week, despite the existence of the A.S.R.S.; and the shop-workers' hours were almost as long as they could possibly be. Generally, however, there had been considerable reduction, with markedly beneficial results to the workers. Although almost all the employers before the Royal Commission on the Depression of Trade bemoaned the handicap of the shorter working week in competition with other countries, very few would go so far as to suggest that the hours should be lengthened. In their Report, the Majority of the Commissioners stated that despite the gravity of this handicap, they believed that

"on social as well as economical grounds... the advantages of the shorter hours compensate for the increased cost of production or diminished output. (They would regret to see any increase because) no advantages which could be expected to accrue to the community of the country would in our opinion compensate for such a change." (23)

Previously the worker had had virtually no time for anything else but work and sleep; now he had leisure, which enabled him to become a man, and the chance to enjoy something of the pleasures of life, which helped foster ambition. Overwork had demoralised him. During her visits to Bacup, Beatrice Webb saw at first hand the effects of long hours that wore out body and nervous system, dulling the appetite, stimulating the desire for drink, brutalising the mill-hands

until they were incapable of decent social intercourse. (24)
 Now the worker became part of the nation, and began to feel that his welfare should be a primary issue of national politics, as it had not been in the past. This, at any rate, was apparently Thorold Rogers' analysis, as early as 1885:

"What means the continually increasing restlessness of late years of those workmen who are now, relatively to their former position, in a passable state of comfort? I contend that it is in large part due to the additional leisure obtained under the nine hours system..." (25)

In particular, shorter hours made adult education possible. By 1861 there were more than a thousand Mechanics' Institutes in England, with over 200,000 members. Together with the free public libraries that were established in many of the cities at about this same time and by the end of the century had spread, gradually, throughout the country, they must have provided a path for many a thoughtful trade unionist into new worlds of ideas, which in turn he opened up for his fellows in workshop discussions. In after years several working-class leaders testified to the stimulus and confidence they had obtained from this source. (26)

24. B. Webb: My Apprenticeship, 164.

25. Thorold Rogers: Work and Wages, 185-6. See also de Roussiers, 56.

26. Lynd, 354; Shadwell II, 291; R. C. K. Ensor: England, 1870-1914, 322; and biographies of Labour leaders, e.g. Tom Mann: Memoirs, 19; B. Fuller: J. H. Thomas, 27.

The Saturday half-holiday greatly extended the workers' opportunities for day-time recreation. Previously they had had only Sunday, when Victorian bigotry, (supported by many of the working-class leaders, such as Broadhurst, who feared the precedent of the Sunday work that would be made necessary by the opening of theatres and museums and other sources of recreation), kept everything but the public house strictly closed. It was during the eighties, too, that commercialised sport became a prominent feature of the national life. (27)

Similar to the position in the matter of working hours was the state of factory and mining conditions and legislation. The number of inspectors was still quite inadequate, and comparatively few occupations were as yet covered by the law - mainly, apart from mining, the mill work in which women and children were employed. Conditions were still far from what they might have been. But, except for the railwaymen, seamen, and dockers - and these were all special cases - there was apparently not a great deal of urgency as far as the men were concerned; and government action had greatly improved the working environment of those who did come under legislative protection compared with former decades. It seems likely that the increased scale of production and the demand for

27. On the development of sport, see Ensor, 165; Shadwell I, 78.

greater efficiency had also resulted in improved conditions for many of the rest: the small, poky, back-yard workshop and the sweater's den were on their way out. No urgent need seems to have been realised by the men themselves in the metal, woodworking, building or printing trades, for example; and in fact there was little demand in Labour programmes for the extension of factory legislation into new fields. Instead there was the plea for an employers' liability act, designed to compel the employers to introduce safer conditions, which made rather a different emphasis - on injury rather than ordinary health and decency. Possibly the legislation that had already been passed had so firmly established the principle of state regulation as to help stimulate further ambition and further aid the spreading of self-respect.

What could the worker look forward to at this time in sickness, unemployment, or old age? Despite all the improvement in standards of living and social conditions, the great majority still lived in dread of the poor-house. In the eighties, partly owing to the belief, always vaguely held by the Victorians but particularly strengthened at this time by the work of the Charity Organisation Society (who set out "scientifically" - in the spirit of the times - to give help only when it would improve the recipients, but

found this almost always impossible), that almsgiving generally did more harm than good, (28) a reduction was being made in the amount disbursed in poor relief. The work-house test was being more strictly enforced than ever, so that the amount of "out-door" relief was greatly decreased. Some of the most significant passages in Escott's book are surely those where this shrewd observer, so sensitive generally to the inner currents of what he saw, hailed this as a notable improvement. Confidently he points to the fact that a great many workers refused relief rather than enter the poor-house as evidence that they had not really needed it. If this lack of relief had caused real distress - he argues in his Liberal innocence - popular outcry would have brought redress. With incredible callousness, he also justifies the separation of families, which the poor-houses were also enforcing, on the additional ground that this would mean they were better cared for; as for the curious fact that many wage-earners had not joined friendly societies, he thought the best explanation was that they believed "there can be no friendly society so good as that into which you put nothing and take out everything - the rates." It does not seem to have occurred to him, and therefore it did not enter the minds of the great mass of his middle-class contemporaries, that a man earning

28. B. Webb: My Apprenticeship, 194ff.

£1 or less a week simply could not afford a worthwhile subscription to a friendly society. Nor could this ruling class comprehend that the workers might regard relief not as charity, but as justice and a right. With complete approval, Escott also quoted the argument from a pamphlet on "Dispauperisation" by a J. R. Pretzman that, since landlord and tenant must, by economic "law", receive their full share of the produce of the soil, the poor rate must ultimately constitute a deduction from what remains - the wages of the agricultural labourer! (29)

Certainly, as well as the friendly societies, many of the trade unions had their friendly benefits. But only one worker in twenty was a unionist. And in fact it was only the unions of the more highly skilled craftsmen that could afford adequate benefit scales, because it was only these higher-paid workers that could afford to pay the necessary high subscriptions. There were few benefits provided, for instance, by the miners' and textile operatives' unions. And the type of friendly society that was most commonly patronised by the workers was the kind that was only a burial club. In 1886 the great federated friendly societies had about 1,750,000 members; the burial clubs about three million. (30)

29. Escott, Ch. XII.

30. Clapham, II, 476.

Contentment is not merely a product of the material benefits received, but depends also on the demands of the recipients. Over the latter half of the century there was a remarkable increase in the standard of comfort expected by the workers. The progress of this tendency varied, of course, in different parts of the country. In Ben Turner's district in Yorkshire, for instance, his grandmother was never more than a mile from her home all her life. When he married in 1884, there was no thought of a wedding journey; in later years a day or two became fashionable, the length of time increasing with each generation. The walls of the houses were not papered, and were painted only when the occupiers were comparatively well to do, while they were decorated with samplers in place of pictures, although there was occasionally the printed portrait of a political champion. Floors were sanded for week days, but a hearth rug was now being laid down for the week-end, to be carefully rolled up each Sunday night or Monday morning and put away till the following Saturday. There were no table-cloths, and drinking was from pint or gill pots, except on Sundays, when there were cups and saucers. (31)

Similar evidence of rising standards is given in his autobiography by the Welsh miner-author, Jack Jones. (32)

31. B. Turner: About Myself, 19, 63-4.

32. J. Jones: Unfinished Journey, 123-4.

When he returned to his valley after serving in the Boer War, Jones found that his brothers, miners like himself, were no longer content with the rough suit of clothes "off the peg" that his fellow-workers and their parents had worn. They now had their suits made to their measurements by a tailor, with their fine linen to match. Nor were they satisfied with the "pub" for their evening recreation; and when they bought bicycles, these too were especially made to their individual requirements. (33)

Although no systematic study appears to have been made of this change in the level of demand, there can be no doubt that it was revolutionary. There are fragments of evidence here and there for instance: the number of passengers carried annually by the railways doubled between 1871 and 1881. (34)

in the course of their occupation: their General Secretary

33. Beside this new standard in "Sunday" clothing, Shadwell found in 1905 a curious conservatism in work-day dress. In one factory he visited, employing from three to four thousand men, he found at the end of the day only one workman using one of the wash-basins, although 2,000 were provided. He declares that this was typical. Cleanliness in a man returning from work was looked upon as an affectation: a dirty appearance was "the mark of their calling, the honourable badge of toil, the privilege of the 'horny-handed'." This was another form of working-class self-respect! (Industrial Efficiency II, 56-7).

34. Lynd, 29.

noted in 1899 that:

"... the public taste has been cultivated up to a much higher level during the last 10 or 15 years. The heavy, rough-looking but wearable boot of the early 80's would not be considered worthy of attention now, something much more pleasing to the eye having to be put upon the market to command a sale." (35)

Partly the higher standards were due to the cheapness that mechanisation brought -- travel was one commodity that became much cheaper. The workers took a great share of the benefits of the steady decline in prices. Partly it may also have been due to their familiarisation with the details of the life of the well-to-do classes through their new literacy. Perhaps it was the higher level of education that was most responsible for less earthy tastes. At all events, life did become much more full, but this helped to excite ambition rather than quench it.

When they entered upon the scene in the eighties, the Socialists commonly made the charge that the workers were becoming poorer and poorer while the employers were getting richer and richer. Although they were quite wrong, it could be true nevertheless that the wage-earners were gaining relatively less than the employing classes of the steady increase in the national income. In answer to the Socialists, statisticians showed that the total share of the workers as

35. National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, Monthly Reports, December, 1899, 1.

a class in the national product remained constant throughout the latter half of the century. It is possibly worth noting, however, that Kuczynski argues that, as the proportion of the working class to the rest of the population increased during this time, the relative share of the individual worker actually diminished, this tendency being particularly marked between the sixties and the eighties. While admitting that an exact calculation is impossible, he gives the following estimate of this movement:

<u>Period</u>	<u>Relative Wages of workers</u>	<u>Share of Capitalists</u>
1859-68	124	81
1869-79	111	89
1880-86	96	104
1887-95	95	105
1895-1903	94	106 (36)

The lack of just provision of social security was perhaps the greatest blot upon the century's progress. The marked improvement in other respects threw it into even darker relief. Probably this is one of the main reasons why it was beginning to attract so much more attention and that the word "unemployed" was coming into the language (37), for, as was seen in an earlier chapter, it seems unlikely that there was much more employment even in the Great

36. J. Kuczynski: A Short History of Labour Conditions under Industrial Capitalism, I, 63.

37. Lynd, 55, notes that the first use recorded by the Oxford English Dictionary is in 1882.

Depression than had often occurred in previous decades. Not only were relief facilities quite inadequate, but, because of their higher standards and culture and new self-respect, the workers were beginning to resent this more deeply. It would hardly have been possible for them previously to ask whether wide-spread poverty should still exist "in a civilised land".

But, whatever truth these figures reveal, it was hardly any difference in relative gain or even the inequality in itself that was a primary cause of the workers' dissatisfaction. Certainly, despite the improvement in their own standard of living, some of them seem to have believed that the Socialists were right. In many instances they did see greater ostentation among their employers, largely due to an accentuation of the effects of the increased national income by the development of new ways of spending and new luxuries. Moreover, second and third generation employers probably spent their money more readily than their forefathers: for instance it was in these years, from about the seventies, that many of them began to build more expensive residences away from the industrial areas of the cities. And the development of a larger scale of organisation in many industries previously managed by small-

masters also tended to increase the gap between workman and employer.

There was indeed probably more than an element of truth in the statement of a docker to the Royal Commission on Labour of 1891-4 that:

"So far as he knew his fellow workmen they would always be dissatisfied while they saw so much wealth in the country, and they got so little. They would always begrudge you rich men the excess of wealth..." (38)

But there had been marked inequalities in other periods of history, without the same measure of discontent. The new range of cheap working-class luxuries in the shops - the machine-produced monstrosities that Morris and Blatchford abhorred - had done more to provoke envy than the chasm between the classes. Although the increase of luxury among the well-to-do may have helped stimulate the wage-earners' appetites, the basic source of their new ambition, in so far as it was a product of social development, was the remarkable rise that had taken place in their own standards of living - material, educational and social.

But this rise, and this new ambition, scarcely accorded very well with the trend of industrial development - as was noticed previously, this was towards the dehumanising of labour relations. No sooner had the worker gained new

38. The Workers' Cry, June 27, 1891.

self-respect socially, than he found craftsmanship and dignity being taken from him by the increased mechanisation and pressure of his employment. This clash between social and economic forces was obviously a most fertile source of working-class discontent.

CHAPTER 6.

THE MOVEMENT OF IDEAS;
LIBERALISM IN THE EIGHTIES.

We have come to realise recently, much more clearly than our fathers did, that under the placid surface of the late Victorian period there was occurring a deep ferment in the world of ideas. This disquiet and questioning was one contributing factor to the change that took place in the temper of the labour movement towards the end of the century. Although the main origins of this change are to be found in developments in the life of the working-classes themselves, ideas which filtered down to them from the educated classes were also influential, and the assistance the workers received from members of other sections of society was almost indispensable. The instance that first comes to mind is the Fabian Society, which did so much to put the workers' demands into practicable form and which is best viewed, in fact, as the culmination of "middle-class conscience", as one part of this movement of thought has been called. This Victorian ferment has been so frequently and thoroughly discussed in recent years that there is no need for a detailed examination here. All that will be attempted will be to draw out some points to show first of all the place given to the

workers in the system of beliefs that represented orthodox in the seventies and later - the complex of attitudes generally accepted by the great mass of the educated part of the community; then to recall, in very brief outline, the currents of questioning that began to flow; and finally to consider the influence of these forces upon the Labour movement by means of a glance at some of the organisations that arose from them and the relations between the Labour movement and the Liberals. The Fabian Society, of course, demands a chapter to itself.

Since 1832 the manufacturers had been the leaders of politics; their ideas dominated the life of the community. Although eddies of revolt could be seen in forms ranging from positivism to anarchism, as late as the middle of the eighties these were of little account amidst the current of the accepted beliefs. And many writers have pointed out that many of the rebels themselves were saturated with the all-pervading individualism from which they were trying to escape. (1) Business men, politicians, scientists, churchmen and the bulk of literary men shared a common point of view: economic individualism was the trunk from which every branch of thought had its growth.

1. See especially H. Lynd: England in the Eighteen Eighties, Chapter III.

For its part, economic individualism derived its validity and even moral sanction from conformity with "natural forces". Thus on February 28, 1880, in reviewing Marshall's "Economics of Industry", the Economist proclaimed that:

"The labour of the economic thinker is only successful when he explains the real working of natural forces, however overlaid they may be by social habits, however unwilling social prejudice may be to admit that they are ultimately irresistible." (2)

And as an example of the ordinary propertied citizen who accepted this point of view there is Beatrice Webb's mother:

"Her intellect told her that to pay more than the market rate, to exact fewer than the customary hours or insist on less than the usual strain - even if it could be proved that these conditions were injurious to the health and happiness of the persons concerned - was an act of self-indulgence, a defiance of nature's laws which would bring disaster on the individual and the community. Similarly, it was the bounden duty of every citizen to better his social status; to ignore those beneath him, and to aim steadily at the top rung of the social ladder. Only by this persistent pursuit by each individual of his own and his family's interest would the highest general level of civilisation be attained. It was on this issue that she and Herbert Spencer found themselves in happy accord. No one of the present generation realises with what sincerity and fervour these doctrines were held by the representative men and women of the mid-Victorian middle-class." (3)

Spencer was amazed that de Laveleye's criticism of this system of belief should go so far as

2. Quoted by Mrs. Lynd, 68.

3. B. Webb: My Apprenticeship, 15.

"to deny that in the average of cases proportioning of rewards to personal merits naturally takes place under the free play of supply and demand." (4)

For the workers the highest satisfaction was to be wages, and even so these were to be mainly for mere maintenance of life, being controlled, in fact, by the "iron law" that kept them at subsistence level: the Times used the term "consumer" as referring to the middle class. (5)

There was no conception that eight hours was long enough for any man to work in a mine, and that in return he should expect a decent material competence and subsistence in his years of old age. Examining a witness before the Royal Commission on Labour, 1891, Sir E. Harland asked:

"Take the case of a young man from say twenty to forty years of age, do you think that he could employ his time very much better under all the circumstances than by spending two or three hours more down the pit, i.e. 10 to 11 hours instead of 7 or 8, and earning more money and putting it by for a rainy day, or when he is an old man?" (6)

The assumptions of the question were naive: life for the worker was to consist of endless toil until leisure was forced upon him. Very rightly Mrs. Lynd comments that:

"The majority of witnesses before this Commission... viewed every problem in terms of unalterable economic forces rather than of human welfare, and found it

-
4. Contemporary Review, Vol. 45, 1884, 461-82, 613-26, 761-74.
 5. P. Mantoux and M. Alfassa: La Crise de Trade Unionisme, 99.
 6. Group A, First Report, 135.

impossible to conceive of human welfare except in terms of conformity to natural law." (7)

And she summarises by describing this philosophy as a

"belief in men as rational, calculating, disparate, competing atoms in society, driven to interest or effort solely by economic need." (8)

So it was that when John Burns first in 1885 led a procession of the unemployed to Whithall the "Globe" admonished the government that

"... the crowd... should have been plainly told that it is not the business, nor can it be the duty, of the Government to provide by artificial means for economic and industrial deficiencies." (9)

It was a bleak, materialistic, inhuman creed. The Victorians were constantly on their guard against being misled by their sympathies. The soul of the worker was left out of account: all analysis was doctrinaire - the wage-earner apparently existed only by grace of the system, and could hardly expect it to serve him. While ready to argue, of course, that the "natural forces" brought many benefits to the workers, as indeed the free-enterprise system did, the Victorians were incapable of going beyond this point to discuss the actual effect of any particular act of "interference". Political economy predetermined the answer. The human side of economic relations could not

7. Lynd, 70.

8. Ibid., 74.

9. The Globe, Feb. 17, 1885. (From "Scribblings" - a scrap-book of clippings compiled by J. Hunter Watts, now in the possession of Mr. H. L. Beales).

be considered. Mrs. Webb showed that this logical result did follow in reality when she recalled of her early life: "I never visualised labour as men and women of different sorts and kinds... labour was an abstraction..." (10) Or, from another point of view, a commodity.

This was bad enough, but it was not all. Behind the facade of economic relations, unrecognised by the Victorians, lay an even more sinister reality: the whole system was based on power. Social class was less a matter of making money or spending it than of giving orders. (11) (Does not Veblen's analysis - that the motivation of the economic system, the goal of all the competition, was the ostentatious display of leisure - make what is really the same point: leisure depended upon the service of others?) There was to be no self-expression for the workers - they were to exist merely to serve the "consumers"? Were they to be anything more than animals? Although the belief that virtue could lift

10. My Apprenticeship, 42.

11. Ibid. Many illustrations of the extension of this attitude into industrial relationships can be found in the history of strikes. The following example, a report of a company's attitude, is from the 1891 Scottish Railway-men's Strike: "... the spirit of the men must be broken, and ... whatever concessions might have to be made afterwards the men must be driven to surrender in order that the concessions might not appear to be the outcome of the strike. It was felt that, at all costs, the working-classes must not be allowed to 'taste' power." (Economic Journal, 1891: Prof. Mavor: The Scottish Railway Strike).

the workers from their class mitigated the creed, its obverse justified their inferior station by placing the blame upon lack of virtue.

Naturally, there was little place in this system for trade unionism. There was only the argument, half-accepted by the eighties, that by giving the workers effective bargaining strength the unions made competition more truly "free". Significantly, despite this concession, Escott first apologised for unionism as "an instinct which, as the law cannot eradicate it, it is sound policy on the part of the law to recognise", (12) and then timidly attempted to justify it on the ground that, through the growth of the practice of arbitration, "the regulations and conditions of unionism have been gradually brought into something more like accord with economic laws." Then he continued by claiming that the growth of this practice had demonstrated an increasing recognition of "the natural relations between employed and employer... as a condition in which there is much real identity of interest." (As has been seen, he was rather mistaken in this interpretation of arbitration). Thus he pointed with satisfaction to the fact that the masons who struck in 1877 had sought the arbitration of their dispute. But, having demonstrated in this manner

12. T. H. S. Escott: *England - Its People, Polity and Pursuits*, 156.

the very good sense of the unionists, he was then at a loss to explain their "outrageous" resentment during the contest of the employers' action in importing foreign workmen.

Obviously this manoeuvre was quite according to the principles of free competition and free trade. Eventually he dismissed the bitterness as being due to the traditional dislike of all Englishmen for foreigners! (13)

Similarly Escott explained that "the signal success of the Factory Acts is in a great degree due to the discretion with which they have been administered", illustrating his point with examples of cases where they had been deliberately relaxed for employers who had found them inconvenient. (14)

(Even in 1890, the Chief Inspector of Factories reported that, although employers were usually helpful when asked to conform, they paid no serious attention to the Acts of their own initiative, regarding them as "a mere form, not to be seriously enforced, or a temporary experiment, to be allowed to lapse".) (15) In another passage Escott claimed that factory legislation "reached, in the Consolidation Act of 1878, a culminating point of efficiency and comprehensiveness beyond which, in the present century, it is not likely to

13. Ibid., 158.

14. Ibid., 143.

15. C6330, 18. See also Shadwell: Industrial Efficiency II, 34.

pass." (16) It had been framed only to protect women and children incapable of protecting themselves: "Wherever it has been tried, interference beyond these limits has proved a blunder and a failure." And, swallowing the familiar fiction regarding the motives of the cotton operatives, he favoured the workers with the compliment that there could not be

"any more conclusive testimony to the sanity of working men's views of the responsibility of the Government than the circumstances that in all this time not one petition has been presented to Parliament praying for any interference with the conditions of adult male labour." (17)

Escott was a shrewd observer, who did not gloss over the extent of the poverty he saw. Yet in discussing the bad case of the canal workers, what concerned him most was the fact that so many couples were living together unmarried on the barges. (18) And reference has already been made previously, in discussing the operation of the Poor Laws, to his complete inability to realise the utter shame and disgrace with which the worker regarded entry to the Poor House, and the complete injustice of inflicting this cruel punishment upon them. In addition to its great value for the picture it gives of English social life in the eighties,

16. Escott, 139.

17. Ibid., 136.

18. Ibid., 142.

his book is also a striking illustration of how completely a Victorian of intelligence and perceptiveness could fall a victim to the current system of belief.

The system was crudely doctrinaire, and distorted the vision of the educated classes to an almost unbelievable degree. Nevertheless it was rather too much to stomach quite completely. Beatrice Webb's mother found it intellectually satisfactory, but could not altogether accept it emotionally. (19) (On the other hand, Mrs. Besant found socialism "intellectually complete and ethically beautiful"). (20) And, although the American industrial "higher classes" were beginning to find themselves quite at home among their British counterparts, making the surprising discovery -- after all their schooling about the effete vanities of monarchical societies -- that many of the "noble" Lords and baronets were financiers, very much at one with themselves in outlook, her unimaginative father was rather appalled at the culmination of the system in its American nakedness. (21)

Similarly

Gladstone did his best in a luncheon conversation, by pointed references to the shortcomings of Andrew Carnegie, to preach a sermon to Mrs. Astor that more subtlety was necessary in

-
19. My Apprenticeship, 15.
 20. Annie Besant: Autobiography, 304.
 21. My Apprenticeship, 8.

the use one made of one's privilege of wealth and power.(22)

Moreover, although it had become dominant among the educated, Manchester individualism had not quite won a complete victory in Britain. Parliament had been sufficiently undoctinaire to bolster up the free-enterprise industrial system with a not inconsiderable amount of interference, to such an extent that a modern historian has stated that it was only these laws dubbed socialistic that kept the allegedly free-enterprise economy in working order.(23) Dilke pointed to the Poor Law as socialism, and noted that it was a uniquely British institution.(24) Escott states it was often explained that the Poor Law was a concession to socialism, granted only to forestall more extensive and dangerous demands.(25) The roots of belief in a moral basis for the polity, in the common responsibility for the welfare of the weakest citizen, lay deep. The Tories had been responsible for a good part of the "interference", and Tory concern for the industrial workers was not motivated merely by a desire to "dish the Whigs" and win the workers' vote. It had roots in the more humane ideals of the patriarchal agricultural

22. Personal Papers of Lord Rendel, ed. F. E. Hamer, 30-1.

23. D. Thomson: England in the Nineteenth Century, 228.

24. New Review, 1890, 60.

25. Op. cit., 197.

society. In fact there was probably a large element of truth in the judgment of the American Shadwell: (who thought British factories over-regulated):

"There are social 'reformers' in England who regard manufacturers and industrial occupations very much as extreme teetotalers regard publicans and the liquor trade." (26)

In calling for social workers to come to Oxford House, Canon Scott Holland voiced his plea in patriarchal terms:

"Come and be the squires of East London." (27)

The prophets had long been uttering their warning - from Burke to Carlyle, Dickens, Kingsley and the early Christian Socialists, Mathew Arnold and Ruskin. And their thought too, as well as the later middle-class leadership, filtered down to the workers: many a working-man socialist was to place Carlyle and Ruskin close behind Henry George or Blatchford among the writers who had burst upon him with a great light.

26. Shadwell II, 33-4.

27. J. Adderley: In Slums and Society, 47-8. Canon Barnett expressed the appeal very similarly: "Do you realise that all our social system is arranged on the tacit assumption that there is a leisured class in every locality who will see that the laws are carried out and generally keep the social life going? Do you also realise that there is no such class in East London, where it is most wanted?" (Ibid).

In all these circumstances therefore, it is not surprising that by the middle of the eighties a reaction was well under way from the moral anarchy and practical and emotional insufficiency of Manchesterian Liberalism. Certainly the general body of opinion was altering only very slowly, but a large section of the educated part of the community was beginning to question the accepted values. Some writers have dated the breach in the ramparts of individualism from the Education Act of 1870, and there is considerable justification for this choice, as this was a definitely collectivist measure, a clear admission that in one sphere at least individualism had not been adequate.

"Middle-class conscience" the movement has been called: a section of the class that had moulded the political-industrial system to their own wishes became aware that their success seemed to have been won at the expense of another and greater part of the community. Perhaps the movement was largely a development or reaction within the history of the growth of thought; perhaps the greater refinement that gradually appeared as the middle-class settled into its new position with its higher standards of living contributed a good deal to its emergence. Probably its pace was greatly accelerated by the onset of the Great Depression, which brought many dogmas into question.

This "middle-class conscience" movement of the eighties, strikingly portrayed from the inside by Mrs. Webb in "My Apprenticeship", was based not upon "a consciousness of personal sin (but) a collective or class consciousness; a growing uneasiness, amounting to conviction..." (28) It was characterised by the scientific, analytical spirit of the time. It took nothing of its impetus from the workers themselves, who were slow to appreciate this development, slower still to trust their new patrons.

From all directions the currents converged. Among the most prominent elements were the Positivists, who tried to create a new religion - a blend of the ethical teaching of the old faith with the science that had seemed to destroy it. The leading Positivists, Frederick Harrison and Professor Beesly, were good friends of the workers in the seventies and early eighties, giving the unions invaluable assistance in framing bills; but did not advance beyond the "old unionist" point of view. In fact Positivism was dead by the nineties, though not before it had done a great deal to stimulate the middle-class questionings. A similar attempt to restate principles of morality by the use of scientific method was made by the Ethical Societies, with greater stress upon the need for a driving force in the reformed society - a moral

spirit without supernatural origins. Although the Ethical movement obtained little or no following among the workers, Dr. Stanton Colt, its leader in the nineties, was one of the early ILP candidates, and Harry Snell was able to couple his ardour as a Labour propagandist with constant faith in the Ethical religion. (29) There was also the Charity Organisation Society, which sought to make almsgiving a science, so that it should cure recipients of their poverty instead of demoralising them, and ended, virtually, in the discovery that charity could never be anything more than a "harmful futility". (30)

Toynbee, whose East End social work received its memorial in 1885 in the founding of Toynbee Hall, literally begged the workers for forgiveness, and took a vow to serve them in repentance. (31) Although Mrs. Webb, the disciplined Fabian, condemned Canon Barnett as a sentimentalist, he was probably equally condemnatory of the existing materialist system when he sought to provide the poor with pleasures instead of necessities: "Poverty cannot pay for the pleasure which satisfies, and yet, without that pleasure, the people perish." (32) There was the generation of clergy and students

29. Lord Snell: Men, Movements, and Myself.

30. My Apprenticeship, 201.

31. Ibid., 183.

32. Ibid., 208.

who followed Toynbee to work in the East End with a vague mission - between 1885 and 1891 six college settlements were established in East London from Cambridge, three from Oxford, and nine or ten from public schools, in addition to several others in provincial cities. (33) There was the publication of "The Bitter Cry of Outcast London" in 1887, followed by a flood of sensation-mongering articles; and Charles Booth's meticulous investigation at the end of the eighties that began as an attempt to unmask the exaggerations of the Socialists and ended in revelations that lay bare an unsuspected mass of degradation. (34) All these components added up to a considerable public movement. The fact that "slumming" even became a fashion - a passing novelty among the well-to-do - is one testimony to its prominence.

On the more intellectual plane, there was the whole movement, almost forgotten now, that Max Beer went so far as to name the "British School of Social Science". Covering the trend of thought in almost all the relevant fields, it

33. R. A. Woods: English Social Movements, 111, 116.

34. The fear that such revelations aroused is well illustrated in a letter that C. R. Wynn-Carrington, Marquess of Lincolnshire, wrote to Broadhurst on Jan. 8, 1888, while Governor of New South Wales: "Things look bad indeed in England - the evidence of the 'Housing of the Poor' (the Royal Commission) made one dread something like the Trafalgar Square row." (Broadhurst correspondence, at British Library of Political Science).

had roots partly in Comptism, and partly in the German historical school that attracted so much English attention at this time, and was greatly assisted by the spread of biological conceptions. It pleaded for a realistic, empirical approach to social problems, as opposed to the existing romantic idealism. Demanding a new, more organic view of social development, it was antipathetic towards industrialism and its competitive basis, and showed a tendency to welcome state activity that contradicted the liberal fear of its extension.

Its fruits were, firstly, the beginnings of social history: Cunningham's "Growth of English Industry and Commerce", Seebohm's "Village Community", Toynbee's "Industrial Revolution" (Toynbee invented the term he used as his title) and the more explicitly socialist writings; secondly, a revolt from orthodoxy in economics, particularly in the work of Leslie (who died young) and Syme, whom Beer names as a precursor of the Fabians. The most prominent economist of the school was Alfred Marshall himself, whose new approach to the subject was stimulated by his preoccupation with the new biology and mathematics. Applying new scientific method from these fields, he removed economics further from the arm-chair that had done so much to make it doctrinaire. Although the work of the new "British School" should have

culminated in his magnum opus -- the "Principles of Economics", first published in 1890 under the motto "Natura non facit salta" -- the synthesis proved beyond his powers. He confined himself to a vague passing mention in his preface of "the ethical forces of which the economist has to take account." (35)

Although it had its effects in politics, contributing to the increasing volume of collectivist legislation that was being enacted whichever the party in power,

"it was neither in Parliament nor in the Cabinet that the battle of the empirical Socialists with the philo-sophic Radicals was fought and won. Though the slow but continuous retreat of the individualist forces was signalised by annual increments of Socialist legislation and administration, the controversy was carried out in periodicals, pamphlets, books, and in the evidence and reports of Royal Commissions and Government committees of enquiry." (36)

The organised Labour movement, of course, took little part in this contest of facts and figures and documents. But -- more especially with the emergence of the Fabians -- the workers were stimulated and encouraged by the findings and argument that filtered down to them and lent justification to their claims.

As might be expected, the movement of revolt from the established system of ideas also showed itself in the church. Among the nonconformists there were no distinct new organisations formed -- unless the Labour Churches, which were

35. M. Beer: History of British Socialism, 231ff.

36. My Apprenticeship, 184.

actually part of the Labour movement, are regarded as a development within the world of nonconformity; at all events the Labour Churches detached themselves from all the denominations. But "middle-class" -- or probably it was rather "ruling-class conscience" in this case, stemming from pre-industrial roots -- was represented in Anglicanism by two societies, the Guild of St. Mathew and the Christian Social Union. The former, led by Stewart Headlam, derived to a large extent from the Christian Socialists of the sixties, Headlam, a High Churchman, Etonian and Oxford graduate, having served under F. D. Maurice. It often startled the Church with its utterances: in fact it made the claim to be the first British Socialist body. The Guild was founded in 1877 when Headlam was a curate in Bethnal Green, but it was not until its annual meeting of September, 1884, that it adopted what it considered a socialist formula:

"That whereas the present contrast between the condition of the great body of workers who produce much and consume little and of those classes who produce little and consume much is contrary to the Christian doctrines of Brotherhood and Justice, this meeting urges on all churchmen the duty of supporting such measures as will tend --

- (a). To restore to the people the value which they give to the land;
- (b). To bring about a better distribution of the wealth created by labour;
- (c). To give the whole body of the people a voice in their own government; and
- (d). To abolish false standards of worth and dignity." (37)

This was going a long way, but it was not quite socialism. Headlam had been strongly influenced by Henry George, and he and his followers constantly stressed that all property must serve the welfare of the whole community, and preached equality and gave considerable help to the socialists, being ever ready to stand bail for arrested speakers and justify the socialist campaign. But they seem never to have declared with out-and-out frankness that property must cease to be private. Their favourite phrases, such as that the communion implied communism, were vague enough just to avoid this distinction. In fact, Headlam and the secretary of the Guild, Frederick Verinder, a layman, both always believed that the Liberal Party could be transformed into the agency to achieve their purposes. Both were prominent in the Fabian Society, where they seem to have been more at home than they could have been in the ILP; and their main political work was with the English Land Restoration League, of which Verinder was also Secretary and which also included a large number of Fabians. Adderley describes Headlam as a Radical rather than a Socialist. Certainly the Guild did present an address to the Lambeth Conference in 1907 asserting the absolute necessity and "essentially Christian" character of

"Socialism - that economic change by which the great means for the production of material wealth is taken out of the hands of those who now monopolise it and becomes the property of the people";

but this seems the only clear-cut statement, and one has had to wait long for it. (38)

The Guild continually stressed that it was primarily Christian, and that its social teachings were merely derived from its Christian basis. It was open only to communicants of the Anglican Church. In 1893 it had 285 members, 77 of them clergymen, in 1895 364 members, 99 being clergy, the main branches being at London, Bristol and Oxford. Its journal, the Church Reformer, was published from 1882-1891. In 1905 a congratulatory address sent by the Guild to the Labour Party on its success at the elections bore the signatures of 170 clergymen; but the society came to an end shortly after 1907, partly because of the formation of the Anglican Socialist League and partly according to Clayton, because of "the waning belief in the Liberal Party". Although clearly not working-class, it had demonstrated that there were many sincerely religious, educated men who regarded property relations as a definitely moral sphere, and thought the existing system immoral. (39)

Comparatively moderate though it was, the Guild alarmed many Anglicans, with the result that the Christian Social Union was formed in 1892 to counteract its influence.

Adderley, who was prominent in this second organisation,

38. Ibid., 51; J. Adderley: In Slums and Society, 202.

39. A. Metin: Le Socialisme en Angleterre, 117; Elton; England Arise, 190; Clayton: op. cit., 51.

explains its origins in these terms:

"But a society that is to convert a whole Church must not be a one-man show, and it must also go more quietly to work than the Guild of St. Mathew could ever do. It was necessary to form the Christian Social Union." The Union was not socialist: Adderley continues: "Yet I was not content with it, chiefly because I had committed myself to the political Socialists, and that was just what a real leader of the Christian Social Union must never do. The Union rightly welcomes all kinds of Churchmen who are agreed upon two things - the urgency of social reform, and the belief that Christ alone can solve the problem. It is a sort of Vigilance Society for the Church in matters of social interest." (40)

Yet Adderley shows elsewhere that he himself did not altogether accept the usual socialist position: "We (Socialists) don't want to abolish property, but to control the use of it for the good of the community." (41) In fact the Union included men of a variety of opinions. Several of its clergy were also members of the Guild. In 1903 the official notice in the Labour Annual stated that the views expressed in its paper, the Commonweal, edited by Henry Scott Holland, were not official but represented an advanced wing of the society. (42)

40. J. Adderley: In Slums and Society, 207-8.

41. Ibid., 245.

42. Labour Annual (Reformers' Year Book), 1903, 38. The Union, or Canon Scott Holland at least, was certainly thoroughly out of sympathy with the ILP in 1895. After the election, Scott Holland stated: "My bitter complaint is that they (the ILP) have wiped out both themselves and all the Labour Party. They have annihilated all the sympathetic Radicalism that could mitigate the warring individualism of property." (A. Thompson: Here I Lie, 89-90).

The original leaders of the Union were Scott Holland and Charles Gore, both noted scholars; its President for some time was Bishop Wescott of Durham (who once rebuked a suggestion to issue tracts explaining the Union's position: "Is your proposal that we should save people the trouble of thinking?") (43); and there were prominent in its ranks several other clergy whose reputation for learning had endured, including Charles Marson and Percy Dearmer - (later Dr. Dearmer and a Professor in the University of London) - both fairly definite socialists. Its headquarters were at Pusey Hall. Within the Church of England it was much more successful than the Guild: in 1896 it had 10 groups within London, 27 branches in the provinces, and several in the United States and the colonies. "Goodwill", a parochial magazine, edited by Adderley but not officially an organ of the Union, had a circulation of 23,000. The Oxford Branch produced the "Economic Review", a journal which attracted considerable attention for its scholarship. In addition, it had published 6 pamphlets and 17 leaflets by 1896, and two books of sermons, one of which had reached a sixth edition. Although it considered its work to lie in study rather than action, the Union publicised "fair tests" of shops and bakeries in several centres at about this time, and was energetic in promoting the

passage of a Factory Bill through the House of Lords. In 1903 it claimed 5,000 members in 60 branches. (44)

Adderley claims that the Union "worked wonders" in influencing opinion within the Church, but admits that the clergy were well ahead of the laymen, and the young clergy well in advance of the old. (45) Whatever its significance for the Labour movement generally, the Union probably helped to confirm the belief of many workers, although this was already very deeply established and they had little contact with the organisation, that their motivation was fundamentally moral. And it was moral fervour that gave the independent Labour political movement a great part of its strength.

Nevertheless the sympathy - not always very understanding - of these Anglican bodies and of the other groups of the educated classes who were beginning to realise the existence of the social problem does not seem to have made any substantial direct contribution to the origins of the change in attitude of the Labour movement. If stimulated by the thought of these groups, the workers certainly did not accept their leadership. And most of the manifestations of this new "middle-class" questioning came to the surface in the period of about 1888-1895 - after the change in the Labour movement had begun. Of much greater moment to the workers was the

44. Labour Annuals, 1896, 45; 1903, 38.

45. Adderley, 207-8, 221.

attitude of the two political parties - more particularly of their traditional allies, the Liberals. To what extent were they affected by the new ferment of ideas? In the early nineties "middle-class conscience" was to have some effect within the world of Liberalism through Fabian "permeation"; but what was the position before then - what could the workers expect of the Liberals in the eighties?

We have seen that, after the sharp rebuke administered in the election of 1874, the trade unionists had very soon given back their allegiance to the Liberal Party. For all the benefits granted them by Disraeli and Cross, there had never been any other possibility. They had accepted these gifts almost reluctantly, as if they would have preferred them from the hands of a Liberal Government, duly chastened after its period in the wilderness, following a subsequent election and return to power. Despite the slowness of the Liberals - because, it seemed, of their lack of contact with the workers' conditions - to realise their point of view, the unionists still saw liberalism as the progressive force and Conservatism as the creed of reaction. Free Trade still stood, primitively, for "fair shares", as opposed to the pampering of particular interests; and the Liberals were the party of Free Trade. (As was to be seen in 1903, the folk-memory of the "Hungry Forties" among the working-class was to be astonishingly

enduring). (46) The Liberals still seemed the Party of principle - of honest, disinterested discussion that led to increasing liberty; the Tories a Party of demagogic expediency that gilded over wealthy class interests.

How well did the Liberals live up to this high regard?

When the Liberals returned to office in 1880 it was still quite natural for the workers to retain this exalted view of their traditional sponsors. Gladstone still seemed its very embodiment. Despite all its qualifications, which apparently went unnoticed, and his subsequent failure to achieve any parliamentary reform, his statement in 1866 of the moral right of every man to the vote had echoed so loudly in the debates and struck so precisely to the core of the workers' claim that it still resounded in their ears. They had no reason as yet to suspect that the new-won franchise would not "clothe their wives in fine gowns", as Odger had predicted. His great Midlothian campaign on the Eastern Question, the predominant cause of the Liberal victory, had seemed another striking exemplification of his zest for justice and liberty, and had won its strongest support among the working classes. In fact his extraordinary prestige among the workers was at its highest point.

46. See particularly the volume of workers' recollections of the forties published at the height of the tariff controversy of 1903-5 under the title "The Hungry Forties".

Great expectations, moreover, were held of some of his followers. It had been a Radical victory: by this time four-fifths of the rank and file of the Party were followers of Chamberlain and Dilke. (47) And in the eyes of the workers', who as yet were still untroubled by the cold revolutionary analysis - still in the necessity of thinking in Radical terms because there were no other, what could be more condemnatory of the existing order, more reassuring of its coming overturning, than Chamberlain's celebrated utterances? He had stressed to the utmost the necessity of ending poverty, wrought striking changes in Birmingham, challenged the monarchy itself, and ventured even to dare the moneyed classes in his startling "ransom" speech. In making his entry upon the national scene in 1873-4, when the tide of discontent was rising, he had declared that the workers' homes "would disgrace a barbarous country" and that "the continued existence and enormous extent of pauperism is another discreditable feature of our so-called civilisation". Even his close association with the "three acres and a cow" scheme of Jesse Collings, moderate though it appears now, was startling and advanced enough then to rouse the workers' fullest hopes. (In 1885 he was still to be advocating manhood suffrage - further even than, for considerations of expediency, the Trades Union

47. J. L. Garvin: Life of Joseph Chamberlain I, 392.

Congress Parliamentary Committee thought it wise to go - together with payment of Members, greatly increased taxation of the rich, and some vaguely hinted "interference" with the low level of agricultural wages.) But the great duel on foreign policy of 1877-8 had temporarily ousted domestic issues: now, apparently, he was to have his chance. (48)

Yet the years 1880-5, the term of Gladstone's second ministry, have very frequently been called a period of disillusionment with Liberalism, and ended in dissension and confusion. Some minor gains were conceded to the trade unionists, in particular an Employers' Liability Act which they regarded from the first as not nearly far enough advanced, and the further extension of the franchise, but nothing of real moment. The trade depression lifted a little, then descended once more; the intolerable distress again increased. But nothing was done, not even an attempt was made, to provide relief.

Certainly the Trades Union Congress had no suggestion to offer - it was to the Government, to Chamberlain, that the workers looked. But, for all his great following in the constituencies, Chamberlain did not have the majority of the Party with him in the House. He did have a very

48. Ibid., 159, 220, 396. A. Thompson was a follower of Chamberlain at this time and believed that the views of his working class Radical Club in Salford "would have passed a test cathecism on the Socialist creed of any present-day (1937) Labour Club." (Here I Lie, 36).

substantial backing, and it had been a sorry misrepresentation of his real strength that he had been allowed to take only Dilke with him into the Cabinet. Yet, as a member of Cabinet, with only one ally, he was virtually muzzled. In 1883, having contained himself long enough and achieved nothing, he recommenced in earnest his campaign for radical social reform, to the extreme discomfort of practically all of his colleagues. In 1884 he was on the point of resignation because of the antagonism of the rest of the Ministry to his fight for a Shipping Bill for the protection of seamen; but was persuaded to remain in the interests of the Franchise Bill. His uneasiness could not be bottled up much longer. (49) Meanwhile the mounting misfortune in foreign policy seemed to underline the Party's apparent ineptitude at home.

Although it has often been argued that it was Gladstone's preoccupation with all the other cares of his position that caused him to neglect the social issue, this explanation is only partly true. It is certainly a fact, as the workers discovered on their deputations to him, that he never sufficiently understood the Labour point of view -- although they seem to have forgiven this in the light of his apparent high honesty of purpose; and it may also well be true, as seems to be indicated by his constant, inflated over-wordiness

that inspired Disraeli's famous thrust, that he tried to extend his mind beyond the very marked limits of its powers. In trying, as he did, to evaluate and balance all political forces within the one vision, he saw the industrial problem in insufficient detail. But there is a further explanation: he did not devote sufficient attention to the workers because his purpose was to preserve the Liberal Party without diverting it appreciably from its course. He attempted, not to win Labour to further support by developing and extending Liberal doctrines, but merely to contain the workers within the existing Party structure.

Gladstone was great enough -- and in this he stands out above his contemporaries -- to realise almost fully the future importance of the Labour movement in politics. Moreover, almost alone, he was great enough to realise in its whole political perspective -- as Chamberlain did not -- the existence and the dynamic importance of the economic basis of the social order. And in this respect he does seem to have felt the promptings of "middle-class conscience". Long before, in an 1843 budget speech, he had drawn attention to the enormous difference in wealth between the classes; and in 1864 he had pointed out that, for all the recent increase in foreign trade, in nine cases out of ten life was still a bare struggle for subsistence, and had continued: "The intoxicating

augmentation of wealth and power is entirely confined to the propertied classes". (50) This was surely somewhat removed from the orthodox stress of the time on the ability of the individual to conquer his environment. Few even in the nineties would have made his criticism of Bryce's study of the United States constitution - that Bryce would have accomplished work of much greater value by examining the social and political effects of the American economic system:

"The incursion and sudden growth of wealth of itself raised questions of vital importance. What was its influence on the structure of human society, on the nature of the individual man? That there should be annually 25,000 divorces in America was a portent, surely? What did it mean?" (51)

And for all his slow vacillation - perhaps another indication of an over-extended intellect - and his undue preoccupation with gradualness and timing - his tendency to ride upon political possibilities rather than create them - Gladstone did have a mind that grew.

Testimony to this effect comes from such a student of Labour history as Max Beer, who claims that Morley's biography is quite inadequate in its treatment of Gladstone's appreciation of social problems, which Morley himself so little understood. (52) And it is confirmed by the records

50. M. Beer: The International Socialist Movement, 141.

51. The Personal Papers of Lord Rendel, ed. F. E. Hamer, 30-1.
 52. Beer: op. cit., 141-2. But, as will be seen from the present treatment, the present writer believes Beer was rather too generous in his judgment.

of Gladstone's conversations with his intimate, Lord Rendel. Politics in the next generation, Gladstone told Rendel in 1889, would be much more difficult than over the previous fifty years, which had been concerned only with emancipations - with the comparatively simple process of lowering barriers. The next period would have to be more constructive: "There would be much that was empirical and much going forward only to go back." In the same year, during a speech at West Calder, Midlothian, he openly showed the workers that he expected them to be the ruling class in the new generation:

"The true test of a man, of a class, and the true test of a people, is power. It is a small thing for a man to be good so long as he has not power... When you become stronger than... (all the other classes)... you will still have before you one achievement to fulfill, one glory to attain and appropriate to yourselves: to continue to be just." (53)

If this was Gladstone's analysis, why did he fail to pay more attention to labour questions in practice? He was in fact generally favourable to the union interests: his appointment of Broadhurst to an Under-Secretaryship in 1885 was a revolutionary step in its day. But it was only a typical device to maintain the attachment of the trade unionists to the Liberals, without any real change in public policy. Although it did succeed for the moment, in the long run it was not enough. Similarly he stated in 1884 that he

53. Personal Papers of Lord Rendel, 95.

approved in principle of the payment of Members of Parliament: Rendel records Gladstone's belief that this should be done by making up to a total of £300 the incomes of Members who had less than that figure, which he thought was the maximum that unionists would like their representatives to get.⁽⁵⁴⁾ But he took no step to bring this into effect. Possibly he feared that such a provision would weaken the hold of the Liberal Party upon the workers. There is the hint of such a fear in his admonition to the workers on the dangers of power, and also in his approval of Lowe's statement that the extension of the franchise would debase all classes of voters.⁵⁵ He wanted the workers to come to power gradually, after a long discipline within the ranks of Liberalism.

Gladstone's great fault surely lay in not giving more positive leadership in social policy. Certainly grave difficulties lay in his path if he were to set out on a Midlothian campaign to win the nation to a new Liberal social policy. There was no clear step he could take to relieve distress that would not have been condemned by the economists of the day: Chamberlain himself seems to have had no real suggestions to offer, but only vague generalities. And even support of Chamberlain seemed bound to split the Party much more seriously than the eventual schism. But Gladstone did

54. Ibid., 62.

55. Ibid., 95.

not give the lead that he could have given. Even in the case of the Shipping Bill, clear, morally-based support as an earnest^{of}/sympathy would surely have brought a quick response from the Labour movement. Like a latter-day Metternich, he seems to have sensed the ending of his system and attempted merely to hold it together as long as he could.

It was not Gladstone, however, nearly as much as his Party which disillusioned the workers. Although he himself urged the Liberal Associations not to reject Labour candidates for working-class constituencies "lest the cleavage between Capital and Labour should become too conspicuous and engulf the traditional party system" (56) and Schnadhorst pressed similar advice from the Party headquarters, the Associations paid little heed. In most cases it was little more than snobbery that was the cause. Short-sightedly, for the workers were only too ready to be loyal, the Liberals missed a remarkable opportunity, and greatly hastened the emergence of the ILP.

When it eventually occurred, the departure of Chamberlain from the Party greatly hastened the revolt of the workers from Liberalism. In their eyes it discredited both Chamberlain and the men he left behind. They never trusted him again, and although the group who followed him,

56. Letter to the Times, Oct. 7, 1901, by A. O. Murray, the Master of Elibank, another of Gladstone's intimates.

and the others who crossed over to the Tories at about this time, were largely composed of the "big business" element - it was at this period that the Conservatives were becoming the party of "big business" - the exodus did not appear to weaken the Whig element among the Liberals and emphasised its obstinacy. Meanwhile, in 1890, Dilke was pointing out that the old Radical ideal of self-reliance had become a conservative rallying-point, its motivation the defence of property interests. (57)

This, then, was the political situation when in the nineties Fabian permeation began to offer the workers the possibility of winning the Liberals over to accept the implications of the movement of ideas, and on the other hand Keir Hardie emerged, to urge that they discard Liberalism and follow the conclusions of the new thought into an empirical socialism.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CURRENT IN THE TRADES UNION CONGRESSES

1880-9.

The main index of course to the appearance and progress of tendencies within the Labour movement is the debates of the Trades Union Congresses. Since these gatherings were complex mixtures of convention, prejudices and irrationalities, with the voting often apparently contradictory, the indications they give are frequently far from clear, but there is no other comparable guide. Moreover their apparent inconsistencies often do mirror real qualifications and subtleties in the minds of the unionists.

For instance, the purpose of this chapter --- to examine the traces in the Congresses of the eighties of the progress of the movement that was to culminate in the formation of the modern Labour Party --- involves the interpretation of many speeches that at one and the same time placed deep stress on the need for independence in politics and supported the running of Labour candidates as Liberals. Is this blatant hypocrisy? Can it have an intelligible meaning? Does willingness to use Liberal sponsorship mean that the unionists who did so accepted

the Liberal economic analysis, or were generally satisfied with the existing order that the Liberals had created? Does reluctance to break the Liberal tie mean subservience or timidity? Although nothing is staler than the truism that broad generalisations are much more apt to mislead than clarify, the mistake has often been made of this period of unionism. Closer examination will show that there was little that was subservient to the capitalist political-economic system in the main current of the development of trade unionism in the eighties. In fact there are clear signs in the Congresses that the movement for independent political action, which in any case was a natural development from the attitudes of the seventies before the onset of the "Great Depression" ^{*forced the unionists to put aside their ambitions temporarily*} had ~~caused a temporary defensive-~~ ^{was beginning} to reach a further stage in the earlier part of the decade quite independently of socialist influence. Some of the unionists of course, may have been stimulated in their questionings by contact with SDF doctrines; but in the earlier years particularly one often finds surprisingly "advanced" opinions proffered from unexpected quarters.

As early as 1879 for instance, the resolution that "any alteration in the laws that would obstruct the ultimate nationalisation of the land would be undesirable" for which

the Marxist Adam Keller could not find even a second-
 took the form merely of an amendment to a motion demanding
 such "reform of the land laws" as would "curtail or at
 least modify....the rights of land-lordism", which was
merely little less advanced. (1) Although advanced

thought in Britain had generally centred on the question
 of land until this time and the Radicals themselves were
 ready to support revolutionary changes in the system of
 landowning, this does not make the proposal any less
 fundamental in its threat to the existing order. Certainly
 the Radicals supported land reform because landlordism
 seemed a monopoly and a privilege and thus a contradiction
 to their system of freedom of enterprise. But as has
 often been pointed out it was a short step from interference
 with the rights of landholders to socialism. Although
 usually as vaguely worded as this, the land resolutions
 were meant, as was pointed out to Harcourt by the Congress
 deputation of 1860, to imply some form of peasant
 proprietorship. (2) In spite of the fact that later writers
 have contrasted peasant proprietorship with land national-
 ization as two distinct alternatives, it appears from the

1. 1879 TUC Report, 25.

2. Printed Report of Deputation -- usually bound with
 library copies of TUC reports.

debates that the delegates regarded the latter as being only one of several possible methods of obtaining the former. Their main objection to nationalisation was that it was likely to arouse unnecessary opposition to the project because of its extremity and practical difficulty.

Weller did not attend the 1880 Congress; and in 1881 a resolution calling directly for peasant proprietorship was carried unanimously. (3) In 1882, when the question of complete nationalisation was raised again, Threlfall of Southport, later to be the most active member of the Labour Electoral Association, protested against "any move towards communism". "They must take things as they were", he argued, "show their respect for property, and at the same time.....(do everything they could to establish a system of small holdings)." Curiously, James Mawdsley supported nationalisation, and the amendment in its favour was carried 71-51. (But a few moments later the delegates reverted to their usual caution, only nine supporting a proposal for manhood suffrage, which was declared to be inopportune, in preference to the equalisation of the county and borough franchisees. Since the Reform League had refused in 1867 to compromise its demand for the full manhood franchise, this decision apparently represented a

retreat; the guiding consideration, of course, was that a moderate request was more likely to be granted.)⁽⁴⁾

Apart from this question of land tenure reform, there had in the meantime been other indications of a gradually changing temper. The previous year, 1881, in the course of a presidential address which W.J. Davis described as typically "matter-of-fact" for a member of the "old" unionists,⁽⁵⁾ Coulson had drawn attention to the existing poverty amidst plenty as being a matter even more serious than the items on the Parliamentary Committee's political programmes. Although quickly disclaiming that he was a violent revolutionist or an advocate of paternalism, and disavowing any belief that improvement could be anything other than gradual, he asked for "all possible aid from legislation". However he also deprecated any class sentiment and concluded in negative vein; "we are prepared to demand that no obstacles shall be placed by Parliament or the ruling classes in the way of our complete industrial independence," and "we have not got a fair field, neither have we favour". Apparently, although the whole speech is tantalisingly vague, he saw the solution

4. 1882 TUC Report, 35-7.

5. History of the Trades Union Congress, 85.

of these social problems in ordinary industrial action, with Parliament ensuring that the unions worked under no "unfair" disadvantage. Nevertheless the very stress on the gravity of the problem seems out of proportion to the proffering of such a solution. (6)

Following this first hesitant movement the barometer climbed a little more distinctly in 1882. In moving a resolution that:

"a large measure of direct representation of Labour in Parliament is desirable and even necessary in the interests of the working-classes and the nation at large; that the time has come when this question should pass from the region of abstract discussion to the domain of practical Labour politics,"

and that a special national fund be established for the purpose, Shipton of the London Trades Council showed that by "direct representation" he meant the sponsoring of Liberal candidacies. But to an objection that this proposal would divide the Party he retorted that any division would be the fault of official Liberalism,

"because it was as much the duty of the party to respect the votes of the working men as it was the duty of the working men to respect the party."

Always unpopular, the suggested special fund was amended 63-43 into a demand for payment of Members of Parliament by the state. (7) As will be seen, this opposition of state

6. 1881 TUC Report, 13.

7. 1882 TUC Report, 28.

payment of Members and the raising of a national fund as alternatives was to be repeated in the Congresses for many years. In the first place the establishing of a fund involved serious practical difficulties; it could not be effectively accomplished without the co-operation of the larger unions, yet these had the resources to run candidates for themselves and regarded the project as an attempt by the smaller societies to obtain the use of these resources for their own purposes. Political representation was still regarded as a function of the separate unions rather than of the Labour movement as a whole; as yet the need did not seem urgent enough to transcend these sectional interests. Some delegates suggested that district funds could be set up more easily. Because of these difficulties the obtaining of state payment may well have seemed more practicable; but why was no attempt made to set up a fund of some kind to serve until state payment was granted? The answer seems to be that such an action would have unduly alarmed the Liberals and thus delayed state payment even longer. Although never clearly stated, this reasoning is often hinted at and seems the only feasible explanation for the way in which the two suggestions were always kept rigidly apart as alternatives.

After the Congress, when an attempt by Broadhurst to

obtain the payment of returning officers' expenses for parliamentary elections from the rates was rejected in the Commons 50-247, Gladstone expressed his approval of the proposal, but stated that to press it at that stage would be a breach of faith with the opposition. At the 1882 Congress, where there were no further developments in the progress of general discontent, there was naturally some criticism of this attitude. But A.F. Cremer, a confirmed Liberal, was not opposed when he said that, although a strong rebuke was needed, it would be wrong "to step aside and censure him (Gladstone) and thus aid and abett the many enemies that he had already." (8) A further difficulty in the path of Labour representation at that time is revealed by a suggestion that a demand be made for the polling booths to remain open till 8 p.m. in the provinces as was already done in London: at that time they were closed at 4. This suggestion was used by Frederick Harrison in an address to the Congress as one illustration of his point in stressing that they should above all be "politically practical" in their requests. (9) And the same argument was repeated by others when nationalisation of the land was again debated. On this occasion Cremer showed himself one of the

8. 1882 TUG Report, 24.

9. Ibid., 30.

extreme party, but the moderates were successful 34-90; thus the decision of 1882 was overturned. (10) Probably it was this stress on "practical politics" that had been the determining influence; in this case the decision represented a choice of tactics and it was not the principle of nationalisation that had been rejected. Similarly assimilation of the county and borough franchises was again demanded in preference to manhood suffrage. (11) (For the same reason, clearly stated by a number of speakers, the same choice was made the following year, although women were then also included "on the same conditions as men" (!) (12)

In the President's address for 1883, the speaker on this occasion being a Nottingham Lithographic Printer, there was one brief but significant note of dissatisfaction with the economic order: "Truly may it be said we have as a nation nearly perfected the means of producing wealth, but we have yet to learn how it is to be equitably distributed." Yet this was combined, in typical trade union fashion, with the assertion that "the twin elements of England's greatness was (sic) the unity and the better understanding between Capital and Labour." (13) And the creation of a national election

10. Ibid, 37.

11. Ibid, 41.

12. 1884 TUC.Report, 44.

13. 1883 TUC.Report, 15.

fund and state payment of members were again discussed as alternatives by the delegates, a proposal that as state payment seemed unobtainable a fund be established being rejected in favour of the usual demand for payment. (14)

At the next Congress, in 1884, the Parliamentary Committee's report made reference to the hardships of the workers because of the depression, and continued:

"We do not ask for State aid, we ask only for the removal of state obstructions to freedom and equality and prosperity. Many of these obstructions will be quickly removed with the increase of power which the suspended Franchise Bill will give to the people." (15)

What were these "state obstructions" referred to? Apparently they were not the inequalities of the franchise, for it was the passage of the Bill that was to enable them to be removed. "State obstructions....to prosperity"?? If it is meant to convey anything definite, the phrasing is tantalisingly vague. The central thought, of course, seems to be the old Radical belief that the institution of government by the whole people would almost automatically, through some miraculous undefined means, remedy the problem of poverty; but what social reforms were the new democracy to enact? Or is this merely a glittering drop added by the front-bench party faithfuls to the torrent of Liberal propaganda in the

14. Ibid, 43-4.

15. 1884 TUC.Report, 14-5.

contest of that year with the Lords?

The next paragraph was more clearly significant:

"In speaking thus hopefully of our future we are not optimists, we are painfully aware of the seething mass of suffering amongst the very poor. No person can walk the streets of our great cities without mental anguish at the sights of misery and suffering there to be seen."

While the admonition that followed that "the duty of every man to do his utmost to assist those who are less fortunate in life" was "one of the cardinal principles of unionism" is rather far from being a socialist answer to the question of remedy, at least it makes the socialist moral stress and seems considerably more than the virtual indifference of official Liberalism. Moreover it is also significant to find that the "old" unionists are already at this early date beginning to take upon themselves the cause of the lowest strata of the community. (16)

Later at this same Congress several speakers objected to a ^{resolution condemning} ~~condemnation~~ of the Lords' attitude to the Franchise Bill as going beyond the line of impartiality and claimed that former Congresses had been very successful in keeping clear of the field of politics. (17) In the light of several speeches already quoted in this chapter, notably Shipton's

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., 19-20.

admission in 1882 that the workers owed a certain duty to the Liberal Party, this suggests that the unionists' definition of what was "political" was an extremely elastic one. In fact it was usually an aggrieved complaint that the Conservatives as well as the Liberals had given a benefit or two to the workers that roused the delegates to cry "No politics! No politics!" At a later session Rosebery himself twitted them on this inconsistency:

"I know the rule which prevents you going near politics, but it seems to me that you break the rule with all the complacency in the world whenever it suits your convenience." (18)

It was the truth in fact that this rule, which had never been a real bar to political activity, related in practice only to the many questions of general politics in which the unions had no particular interest. As their own political interests began to increase in importance in their own sight until other issues were overshadowed it was to disappear.

When Labour representation was discussed, it was John Wilson of the Durham Miners, the staunchest of Liberals in political philosophy, who proposed the usual motion, declaring, to shouts of approval, that -

18. Ibid., 34-5.

"he was as directly and as strongly as ever he could possibly be in favour of a distinct Labour party being formed in the parliamentary life of this country."

He thought the Parliamentary Committee's report "bristled with the idea." (Wilson was one of the few supporters of land nationalisation in the debate of that year.)⁽¹⁹⁾ But for all the applause Threlfall could muster only four votes in favour even of a voluntary election fund.⁽²⁰⁾

At a later session, with all the implications made clear in the short debate, a motion was carried that the "hereditary principle should be removed from our constitution."⁽²¹⁾ Far from socialism, certainly, and no more than the advanced Radicals had openly advocated (although the Republican movement was long past its hey-day by that time), but surely further evidence that the unionists were by no means timid in their political attitudes.

When the 1885 Congress met at Southport with Threlfall in the chair a clearer note was sounded. "My wish is to show," he declared in his presidential address,

"that legislators always bear the stamp of the class to which they belong.....It is of course urged that the labouring community have reaped a fair share of the national prosperity. I question whether this is true

19. 1884 TUC Report, 38.

20. Ibid., 31-2.

21. Ibid., 43.

of any particular industry; but it assuredly is not so when applied to the working classes. Are you satisfied with the miserable condition in which vast masses live?"

(He proceeded to draw a striking contrast of the economic classes, of the poverty amidst the luxury).

".....the growing population yearly adds to the ranks of the poorest, for, as I before observed, wealth is, if anything, accumulating in fewer and fewer hands.... True, property has its rights, and so has the poorest individual in the land. He has a right to live. He has a right to food, shelter and clothes; and if Christianity and civilisation means (sic) anything above paganism he has a right to brotherly consideration."

(Next he condemned the Poor Laws as basically wrong in attitude, although.....)

"the question of judicious relief without creating life-long paupers is surrounded with great difficulty. (But).....there is the admission of a valuable principle, the right of the individual to obtain assistance from the State when in want."

The delegate who moved the vote of thanks admitted disagreement with some of the opinions expressed, but the address ~~does~~ seems to have been received with unusual enthusiasm. (22)

What is the significance of this -- everything considered -- rather remarkable speech? Is this the same Threlfall who was soon to be the leader of the Labour Electoral Association, and to conduct it safely into the ranks of Liberalism?

Although it does not by any means follow the strict path of the Marxist creed, particularly in the fear of "creating life-long paupers",^{and} its concession of the rights of property, and the appeal to Christianity, this is clearly a socialist utterance. This is seen more especially of course in the stress upon economic rights of "the poorest individual". As has been noticed, reference to the class bias of legislators was frequent enough in the seventies and even little to socialism; but the claim that poverty was increasing in the midst of plenty seems to smack of the SDP. Although far from being a convert to their doctrines, Threlfall may well have been stimulated by the Marxists even at this early stage. Certainly, and whether or not this was so, neither in letter -- though it is idle to expect even a compositor to be a competent political philosopher -- nor in spirit was this address compatible with orthodox Liberalism. Nor were Threlfall's phrases mere rhetoric -- it was not necessary to be so specific for that purpose.

Did Threlfall become tempered very quickly, or was it that, with more experience of the political inner world, he came to accept the view that Liberal patronage, niggardly as it was, yet offered more tangible recompense and faster progress towards the ultimates than the long wandering in the desert of complete independence? Or was this always his

political philosophy, and was this what he was always intending to press to recognition through the machinery of Liberalism? Although these questions can hardly be answered, there is every reason to believe that this last suggestion is the true one. It is supported by the fact, which will be seen when the next Congress is considered, that Threlfall and others meant by their demands for a "distinct Labour Party" merely a pressure group within the Liberals. Paradoxical as it may seem, they did not see this situation as in any way incompatible with their complete independence.

One point at all events is clear: since Threlfall's address met with considerable approval, a large nucleus of opinion existed as early as 1885 which would sooner or later bring a completely independent Labour political party into existence. And that Threlfall's utterance was something more than an isolated, personal inspiration is surely hinted by a paragraph in the Parliamentary Committee's 1885 election address:

"There are, unmistakably, signs that the era of social reform is nearer at hand than at any time in our history. Crimes which are mainly the result of poverty and wretchedness are being unmasked; cries of the victims are penetrating into quarters where the cry for justice never before reached." (23)

This suggests that at the very least the "old unionists" too were being drawn along in the same current of thought that was creating the new "middle-class conscience" movement, although indeed the wording seems to imply that "social reform" and "justice" had always been their aim, and that now for the first time it was receiving sympathetic attention in other circles. At about this same time James Mawdsley of the Cotton-spinners, who ten years later was to lead the reaction against "new unionism", declared that he could see "no chance of improvement so long as the present state of society continued to exist", (24) and in 1882 such a firmly based Liberal as Thomas Burt of the north-east miners had predicted that the working-classes were about to endeavour "by peaceful and lawful means, to accomplish nothing less than a reconstruction of society." (25) But within the next few years, when the socialists came forward with specific, far-reaching remedies, the "old" unionists were to become rather more cautious in their choice of terms.

Meanwhile the moral was drawn: in the debate that year on Labour representation - on the usual vague resolution - C. J. Drummond of the London Compositors pointed to the Irish party as the example they must follow, giving this as his illustration when he pressed for "the formation of no

24. Webbs: History of Trade Unionism, 379.

25. Fortnightly Review, December, 1882.

distant date of a labour party... of their own... in the House of Commons". And another speaker urged that they must persevere despite all Liberal accusations that they were splitting the Party. (26)

At the next Congress in 1886 several of these ideas reappeared. For instance the opening speech by Mawdsley, who was chairman of the Parliamentary Committee, pointed again to the example of the Irish party. (27) And, despite a reference to the recent Liberal government as "the most progressive ever in Parliament", the Committee's report drew attention to the "social discontent", claimed fundamental economic rights for the workers, and seems, a disclaimer of "plausible nostrums" notwithstanding, to point to a vaguely socialist solution:

"Whether we look at home or abroad, similar signs of social discontent are apparent. In England the distress, with consequent demand for work, has been exceptional, and justly interpreted means the right of the toiler to live. (A reference follows to the evils of unlimited competition, at home as well as abroad). The work of Congress done?... Why we have but cleared the brambles from our path to obtain freedom for striking out a policy which will make the social life of the workers more worth living. ... What has really been gained? ... Already the capitalists of the world possess the marvellous power of steam, the telegraph, the telephone and all the instruments of production. The workmen possess none of these, hence their absolute inability to ever rise in the aggregate beyond the level of mere subsistence." (28)

26. 1885 TUC Report, 34.

27. 1886 TUC Report, 11.

28. Ibid., 18.

And in an almost interminable address, taking up seven and a half pages of the official report but received with marked enthusiasm, the President of the Congress, F. L. Maddison, later to be a Liberal M.P., repeated several of the same points. While disclaiming any intention of being an "alarmist", he referred the delegates to the doubt and anxiety of "thinking men of all classes" and claimed that it was justified:

"... taking everything into consideration, I can come to no other conclusion than one of discontent with the existing state of affairs as regards so many of our fellow men and women. I think that, although we may differ as to the causes of the state of things as well as to the remedies, we are agreed that the toiler does not get a fair share of the results of his industry."

He pointed to the payment for match box-making - 2d. a gross - by a company that was paying a 22% dividend for the half-year; quoted a statement - from Broadhurst of all sources - that poverty was the source of a good deal of immorality and crime (although this was seen to be a fiercely contested item of socialist propaganda, as has been seen it had also appeared in the Parliamentary Committee's report for the previous year); confessed that unskilled workers were often hostile to the unions, admitting that much of their condemnation was deserved; and stated that, whether or not it were nationalised, some way must be found to ensure that the land was farmed for the common good. (29)

This 1886 Congress, in fact, seems to mark a high-water level of "old-unionist" discontent and of their movement towards collectivism as a general principle. In later years, as the conclusions of their own arguments were logically drawn for them and their vague suggestions extended and gathered together into specific socialist demands, the "old guard" appear to have fallen into alarm. Suddenly aware of the consequences of really alarming the Liberals, they beat a strategic retreat.

Thus it comes as no surprise to find that it was at the 1886 Congress that the Labour Electoral Association was established, firstly in the form of a standing "Labour Electoral Committee" of the Congress, and that in the debate on the motion calling it into existence, many delegates were very adamant on the need for complete independence. For instance, Martin of the Hartlepool Branch of the Typographical Association, "expressed a strong opinion that labour candidates should not ally themselves with any political party, but go in as independent candidates." Snow, of the Cleveland Blast-furnacemen, said, "they need never expect to get the rights of labour legislated upon them while they depended upon landlords or capitalists, Whigs or Tories, to represent them"; and Hughes, Liverpool Bookbinders and Machine Rulers, also advocated completely independent action. As several

speakers expressed doubts about the practicability of weaning the workers from their present political allegiances, it was obviously complete independence that they too had in mind. Yet Pickard of the Yorkshire Miners thought it best to support a party in general political issues, and as a Liberal, conceded the right of Conservative unionists to do the same. And Threlfall himself, the most prominent advocate of determined political action and the author of the proposal to set up the Electoral Committee, warned the delegates that "they could not contest any seat without declaring their adherence to one or the other of the great political parties." (Apparently he regarded this as having been a self-evident premise of all his strongly-worded pleas for political action in order to reform the bases of the economic order: as it was obviously beyond the bounds of practicability, he had never meant to imply absolutely complete independence.)

"He had, however, sufficient confidence in the working-classes to believe that, when once returned to Parliament, they would sink all party feeling in favour of the uplifting of the masses of the people."

So the complete re-ordering of the economic system lay outside the field of party politics, bearing no relation to the division between the parties: there was at least an element of truth in this! (30)

When Threlfall's motion was carried by 59-19, many of the majority were undoubtedly voting for a political organisation very different from a mere appendage of the Liberal Party. Some believed they could achieve their objects through the Liberals; some at least intended to achieve them despite the Liberal Party.

Consideration of these debates, such a medley of self-contradictions, throws new light upon Hardie's tactics and the reaction to them when he made his first dramatic appearance at the following Congress in 1887. Once again, to judge from the opening address of the President, a local unionist with no national reputation, the barometer of the new movement was rising.

"It is gratifying and encouraging to find that on every hand arise demands for a distinct Labour party. Organised and unorganised Labour unite in the belief that the ordinary political parties are useless to secure the industrial emancipation. . . . Of course we shall be told that State interference in these matters is injurious. Be careful not to take thine enemy's advice. It is very singular that this objection to State interference is only urged when questions of labour are brought forward. (He next gave instances of use of legislation by the employers). Gentlemen, Socialism has lost its terror for us. . . . Parliament must pass an Eight Hours Bill."

Then he continued by elaborating and expressing strong approval of this measure, which had not quite, as yet, become recognised as a test question. (31)

Hardie opened his attack at the first opportunity, seeking insertion of a record in the annual report that Broadhurst had voted in the Commons against the Eight Hours clause for the miners, but without arousing very marked attention. Tea-cup storms from delegates when the particular interests of their trade had been slighted were common enough at the Congresses. Nor was much notice taken of his attempt to delete "by refusing State assistance" from a passage in the report stating, "labour ... cannot fail to increase its dignity and importance" -- which itself showed that the President had gone beyond the views of the "front bench": the issue had not yet become a burning one. (32)

Before the Congress had proceeded much further, the work of the Labour Electoral Association was discussed. Hardie's difficulty was then made clear when Threlfall once more declared for complete independence, strongly and clearly enough for Pickard to retort that he, for one, had been "burnt that way" in 1874. Further, Maddison, the very President of 1885 who had expressed himself so strongly on the injustice of the existing order, now eulogised the Liberals as the party of progress. (33) Hardie has often been blamed for making his attack on personal lines, his

32. Ibid., 22.

33. Ibid., 28-30.

critics arguing that he should have kept to the general point of Labour political tactics; but what more could he have added in general terms in favour of complete independence to what Threlfall had just said, and to what others in the previous years had ostensibly been urging? Something more was needed, that would make ambiguity impossible. Notoriously impervious to generalisations, the Congresses were capable of applauding two directly contradictory general statements in the space of a few minutes; but concrete cases of apparent injustice or betrayal would always sting them into specific action. It was thus that, seizing upon an incident that may have been brought to his notice by Champion or Maltman Barry, Hardie rose again to attack Broadhurst, (34) this time on the

34. The facts of the incident were that in a bye-election campaign Broadhurst had spoken from the platform of the Radical, Thomas Brunner, the famous chemical manufacturer, who, according to Hardie, was subjecting his labourers to very bad working conditions. The grounds for suggesting that Champion had supplied Hardie with this information are that Champion was to give a great deal of attention to the matter in the "Labour Elector" and was to be closely associated with Hardie in 1888. But the Labour Elector was not published until 1888, and in 1893 Hardie stated in the "Labour Leader" (quoted in J. Burgess: Will Lloyd George supplant Ramsay MacDonald, 84) that he first met Barry at the 1887 TUC "... when he made himself very agreeable, especially after I had begun the attack on Mr. Henry Broadhurst" and that he met Champion later. It may be that it was Champion who followed up Hardie's lead in the matter but, considering Hardie's lack of contacts at this time, I think it possible nevertheless that it was the two intriguers who had unearthed the material, and that Barry gave it to Hardie as a suitable person to use it, probably following Hardie's first attack. Barry once stated that Champion passed the information on to Hardie through the agency of Cunninghame-Graham. (Burgess: John Burns, 130-1.)

specific charge that he had given political support to a bad employer. It was as a clear, unambiguous instance of what he meant in urging complete independence that Hardie pressed home the indictment.

His plan succeeded in its main purpose, which was to attract the maximum of attention. Rarely can an unknown new-comer to the Congresses have aroused such a furore - it is a tribute to Hardie's judgment that he had to be taken so seriously: the delegates rose in an uproar. With a single stroke he had cut through all their self-deception. And in their response all their coarseness and mob loyalty was revealed at its worst. Although his attack was no more personal than has been shown above, Hardie has often been censured, even by later and friendly writers, for some supposed want of civility: more significant was Broadhurst's studied rudeness in reply, and the loud applause with which it was greeted. Broadhurst made little or no attempt to defend his action against which the charges had been made: instead, Hardie's age, size, beard, and lack of reputation were ridiculed. (35) There are few readers whom the report of his speech would not disgust. Yet he, Broadhurst, was an ex-Secretary of State, the symbol to the delegates of their own importance and sagacity, and as he played deliberately upon this self-esteem, they laughed uproariously with him. Hardie's rudeness

34a. See especially Burgess: Burns, 133.

35. 1887 TUC Report, 30.

had, in fact, consisted only in picking upon Broadhurst for his attack.

Yet Hardie had not altogether missed his target in the engagement. In rousing two Nottingham delegates to Broadhurst's defence, he had led them to tell him to mind his own business: when Broadhurst adopted a similar defence the following year, some were to question whether this meant that he was still a Labour Member. (36) And he had clarified the issue. Unspoken assumptions that had been lying underneath the "old unionist" arguments and had made them ambiguous to many of the delegates were now brought into the light.

Fenwick now declared that

"unless they were prepared to ally themselves with one or other of the political parties, be it Tory or Liberal, and to ally their influence with the party there must be a long time to wait for the emancipation of the working men of the country."

Pickard stated that the whole question was one of where to find the necessary money - an explanation that made the whole debate much clearer, bringing the issue nearer to the level of a choice of tactics. In actuality it was no more than that, even - as will be seen shortly - in Hardie's mind. And then, as if to demonstrate once more how meaningless words might seem, John Wilson of the Durham miners, the staunchest of Liberals, again declared himself "unhesitatingly" in favour of a "distinct Labour party, separate from the two great

political parties." (37)

The following year, 1888, the IMA men did their utmost to show that their body was meant to be quite an independent organisation. In the opening address, the President declared that

"If political parties ignore the cause of labour, as they have done in the past, then labour must run its own men, whatever political party may suffer or political chieftain be disappointed."

He also wanted "men of the study" kept out of the Association and the International Congress. (38) And when he arose to urge the formation of more local Electoral Associations, Threlfall echoed this note in warning them to be most careful of the Liberals they chose to support - only working-men should be recognized as Labour candidates - and also in stating that their aim must be to become so powerful that the party "would not dare to oppose them". Later in the debate he repeated that

"they could not too specifically declare that no man who was not a Labourer was fit for a Labour candidate." (39)

In taking up this attitude, the IMA do seem to have aimed at a marked degree of independence. This, in fact, was as far as they could go without precipitating a complete breach with the Liberal leaders, which they would have considered, with some justification, a tactical error. (The

37. 1887 TUC Report, 31-2.

38. 1888 TUC Report, 17.

39. Ibid., 23-4, 26.

LEA also maintained -- by 1889 at least -- that "it is practically injurious to the cause to take up a position which cannot be enforced"; i.e. to run a hopeless candidate). (40)

The issue between them and Hardie was, in fact, almost entirely a question of tactics -- they differed from him mainly in their assessment of the relative benefits to be won from delicately preserving an unstable alliance with the Party and plunging unequivocally into a complete breach with it. Although far from being avowed Socialists, they were in actuality collectivists almost as much as he was: in fact, as will be seen, Hardie's Socialism had always a nebulous quality. Threlfall, at least, was still declaring, in 1888, that "every man had a right to food and clothing", and that "they wanted to send Labour members into the House of Commons in order to get at the causes of the present disposition of wealth." (41)

They did not see their own collectivism as incompatible with Liberalism: indeed they regarded the Liberal Party as being their own traditional political organisation quite as much as it was the expression of the employers, and thought themselves as equally entitled as the caucus, and even more, to define its industrial policies. After all, they represented the workers, who provided the bulk of the Party's support: the problem was how to assert

40. Labour Electoral Association 1889 Conference Report, 10.
41. LEA 1888 Report, 23.

their rights within the Party effectively, especially since they were so weak in financial resources.

The device of insisting on actual working-class candidates, crude as it might be - as Hardie was soon to point out - provided a necessary rallying point. To a certain extent it was a safeguard against the real danger of mere adventurers taking advantage of the movement. After all, the unionists had every reason to beware of such self-appointed leaders as Champion and Hyndman. But it was also more than this. The unionists were justly wary of the persuasive powers even of sincere middle-class sympathisers who would misguide them from lack of the complete understanding of Labour requirements that only a worker could possess. "A gentleman of education would come before them", Threlfall explained, and for an instance he gave the International,

"and by the force of his trained abilities he would be able to exert an influence upon the delegates, and get them into a position which they might afterwards regret." (42)

It was Hardie's genius that he could mix with the "left-wing intellectuals" on equal terms and make good use of them for Labour purposes; but no other working-class leader had this power, and the LEA was aware of this fact. On the other hand the provision was one measure of the Associations's

considerable degree of real independence in attitude: it followed naturally from Threlfall's judgment upon all the men of property, Liberals and Tories, who monopolised the Commons, that "They could have no affinity with the working-classes." (4)

And the LEA never failed to make this stress. So independent in attitude, in fact, did the LEA prove to be, so close was it sailing to the wind, that the party Liberals among the Congress leaders, whose outlook differed significantly from the bulk of the delegates, were beginning to take alarm. Fenwick, for instance, now complained that the utterances of many LEA members had already done considerable harm to the "present Labour" Members, and claimed that the chances of gaining payment of members were actually being prejudiced by the Association's activities. Apparently all the dangers of alienating the Party leaders - and payment of members was always seen as of primary importance - had not been too darkly drawn. And, giving voice to the party-Liberal conviction that Labour questions were of minor importance within the whole field of politics, he pointed, too, to the difficulty of bringing them to the forefront of elections:

"They were citizens, and they had interests in the State as well as personal interests arising from their labour. Therefore, if they were to be returned to Parliament at all they must go as politicians prepared to take their

part in everything which affected the nation whatever impeded the progress of the nation would tend also to impede the progress of industry." (44)

Although Fenwick had thus, in individualist fashion, identified the welfare of the workers with "the progress of industry", few of the delegates would have agreed that this required them to give the employers a free run in politics.

On the other hand, Hodge of the Steel Smelters, whose Socialism, even when he opposed the Liberals as an independent Labour candidate in the late nineties, was never to be much more than a sort of radical-collectivism, was afraid of the danger of declining into a mere tail of the Liberal Party, and thus advocated a course at least as uncompromising as that of Parnell. And while a Bradford delegate hoped wistfully that "... the time might soon arrive when they would be able to ... go in for Labour representation pure and simple", W. Matkin still averred that, "If the Labour movement was to make any progress at all it must be on independent lines." (45)

As has been mentioned above, when Hardie renewed his attack on Broadhurst, on the same lines as in the previous year, he now drew blood.

One of his charges was that Broadhurst had refused to raise a question in the Commons pressed upon him by Champion, which alleged that the same Liberal M.P., Thomas Brunner, had

44. 1888 TUC Report, 24.

45. Ibid., 24-5.

done a grave injustice to one of his workmen. While Fenwick's explanation that this would have endangered negotiations then proceeding over workers' compensation was probably acceptable, if rather thought-provoking, Broadhurst was on equally good or better ground when he denied any obligation to follow the behests of anyone so unrepresentative of the unions as Champion. But he overstepped the mark by going on to explain that "he should only acknowledge and take notice of such political matters as his constituents had drawn his attention to." One delegate openly took him to task: "If what he said was really meant Mr. Broadhurst was no longer a labour member," and others also had misgivings. (46)

The following year, 1889, the last before the Congresses were transformed by the appearance of the "new" unionists, Hardie attacked again on precisely the same grounds, but this time his efforts were much less effective. Although he received some weak support from two Scottish delegates, he had overplayed his hand, and an extensive leaflet campaign pursued by Champion and Barry in the previous year had done his cause much more harm than good. This was typical of the methods of these two "labour journalists" - Champion's Labour Elector was a shrill, scurrilous sheet - and bound to be resented by the delegates. Determined to put an end to

these irritations, Broadhurst resorted to his usual personal abuse, but coupled it on this occasion with a more effective counter-charge: that the pamphlets, distributed in their thousands, had been printed with Tory gold. Where else could the money have come from? Hardie was hoist with his own petard: Broadhurst was upheld by the Congress by a vote of 177-11. (47)

At a later session, Threlfall went so far as to repeat against the Socialists the complaint that Fenwick had made of his own organisation the previous year: "If there was any obstacle to the progress of the LEA, it was the Socialists in this country." As at this time the Socialists, apart from Hardie, consisted of the SNP, the Socialist League, an odd middle-class Socialist Society in some of the provincial towns, the scarcely known Scottish Labour Party and Champion and Barry, there was some ground for his contention that they did not represent the unions in politics and brought them no credit. (48)

The LEA itself was making no progress. As it had never attracted the attention of more than a handful of the unions, its action in separating itself from the Congresses in 1887 - on the ground that it could more easily formulate a clear, coherent policy as a separate body(49) - was only

47. 1889 TUC Report, 22-9.

48. Ibid., 40.

49. 1888 LEA Report, 30.

consistent with its standing as a small clique within the Labour movement. The debate on political representation continued at the Congresses as before, with little mention of the LMA: never for a moment did the delegates seem to regard it as the political expression of the movement. And this is despite the fact that its policies and attitudes were fairly representative of the Congresses. None of the existing Lib-Lab M.P.'s had any connection with it, or appeared to take much interest in its activities. The whole situation seems curious, and it is difficult to suggest a satisfactory explanation. Apart from Broadhurst, who had managed without union support, the Lib-Lab M.P.s were all miners who owed their success to the preponderance of miners in their electorates and the strong financial support of their unions, and thus had no need of the LMA. The LMA leaders were mostly trades council men. On the surface it appeared that the root of the Association's weakness was the financial difficulty, due largely to its failure to win over the other large unions. Yet it never placed any grave stress upon this difficulty and in fact Threlfall offered Hardie £400 for his 1888 campaign at Mid-Ianark, with the promise of more if required. Despite Fenwick's protest that the Association was embarrassing the Lib-Labs and Threlfall's own avowals that they should press their independence without regard to

Liberal convenience, it could hardly have been excessive audacity that cost the LEA support. Its practice was to try to force its candidates upon Liberal Associations, but whenever it failed in this object it refused to alienate the Party by continuing to run its own man in opposition to the Party choice. It would take no risk of delivering a seat to a Tory. Nor on the other hand, considering the generally cautious temper of the time, could this timidity have alienated much prospective trade union backing.

The best explanation seems to be that the trade union leaders had other reasons for looking upon the LEA with suspicion. Some indication of these misgivings was given some years later by W. Inskip, of the Boot and Shoe Operatives:

"For myself I worked hard when ^{at} the Hull Congress a Labour Electoral Committee was formed, to make it a success; but when I found it was being worked mainly for the interests of one man, I withdrew from the Committee, because we were refused the name of a subscriber who had sent in a cheque for a large amount of money." (50)

Even so it remains rather a riddle why, with his "large cheques" to aid him, Threlfall did not cut more of a figure upon the political stage.

By 1889 therefore, before the "new" unions had come

-
50. (National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, Monthly Reports, November, 1893, p. 27). As will be seen in Chapter 15, Inskip was a convinced and faithful Liberal.

upon the field, (51) there was a strong body of feeling within the Labour movement in favour of independent political action. Although the LEA had proved abortive, the discontent that had brought it into existence had been significant, and had been plainly marked as early as 1885. A large body of unionists had grown clearly dissatisfied with the concessions that from time to time they were able to wring from the Liberals. Although they were making progress, it was too slow. It also seems significant that, even at this early date - before the uprising of the "new" unionism - they were basing their discontent on the condition of the poorest section of the working classes, though this may have been no more than the use of a convenient cudgel. Moreover a new spirit of ambition was appearing, signalled by the eight hours movement, which is important enough to be discussed separately in another chapter.

Yet great difficulties lay in the path, particularly the need of money to return Labour members to Parliament and

51. Curiously, the LEA gave a sign that it sensed the coming of "new unionism": at its 1889 Conference, held in April, some months before the gasworkers' and dockers' strikes, Stuart Uttley, of Sheffield, one of its most prominent members, declared that "One object of the Association was to promote combination among the classes of Labour which have appeared for a long time to be outside the pale of combination". (Conference Report, p. 8). Is this a further indication that the LEA was really an early manifestation of the coming developments within the Labour movement?

support them once they had been elected. The best solution to this problem seemed to be to obtain state payment of election expenses and Members' salaries. But would the Liberals ever make this concession, especially if they suspected that it would give the workers great power that would sooner or later be turned against them? Certainly, if the unionists began to take up too independent an attitude, such as would be indicated by the setting-up of a national political fund, which was a project involving almost insuperable practical difficulties in any case, the Liberals would be all the more reluctant to grant them this favour.

These tactical considerations dominated the whole issue. Considering all the disadvantages that would face them if they were to change from their traditional course of working from within Liberalism, the great majority of unionists were not yet dissatisfied enough to take the decisive step. While their ultimate aim was undoubtedly complete independence of the Liberals, they still believed they would gain this end more quickly and comfortably by first obtaining payment of Members than by making an immediate breach and pitting their strength against the power of Liberalism under the existing conditions. Moreover, all their disillusionment with the Liberals had not yet brought them to the point where they would readily consider giving an advantage to the Conservatives

through the splitting of the vote.

Although their own political thought was strongly tinged with socialism, they were eager to dissociate themselves from the socialists. Partly this was because no form of socialism that attracted them had yet appeared: SDP Marxism seemed only a doctrinaire system of nostrums. More important, probably, especially as socialist ideas began to win a foothold among the workers, was their fear of alarming the Liberals and thus further imperilling payment of Members: there are traces of a retreat from the outspokenness of 1885-6 for this reason.

Naturally, the vested interests and life-time habits of thought among some of the trade union leaders also contributed to the decision not to break with the Liberal Party; but there were also signs, notably in the eight hours movement, that the rank and file of unionists, while preserving an outward loyalty to their leaders - as was shown by the unchanging composition of the Parliamentary Committee - were beginning to question their judgment. But these factors were probably of minor importance beside the influence of tactical considerations.

CHAPTER 8.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE
SOCIALIST SOCIETIES.

What part did the socialist societies of the eighties - more particularly, of course, the Social Democratic Federation - play in the movement among the workers towards complete independence in politics? And what is the significance of their emergence?

From beginning to end, the history of the SDF as a working-class organisation is one of virtually unmitigated futility. In fact, in its relations with the Labour movement it is probably best regarded as one of the several manifestations of middle-class conscience. It made little direct appeal to the workers, but merely provided a small contribution to the intellectual stimulus that helped to accelerate their revolt from Liberalism.

As is well known, the Federation derived directly from Marx. And Marx's rigid logic has never been taken deeply to heart by the mass, or even by an influential section, of British working-men. Almost immediately after the SDF was founded, Marx quarrelled with Hyndman, not in reality, as has often been alleged, because of the Englishman's decision not to pay open tribute to the master as the source

of his ideas - an omission that he justified well enough with the explanation that the foreign name would have alienated British workers - but because the jealous Engels used the incident to foster Marx's distrust. (Hyndman claimed, however, that good relations were later restored).⁽¹⁾ More significant, possibly, is the fact that neither before nor after the quarrel does Marx, who knew very well the apathy of the British workman towards his type of analysis, seem to have expressed any enthusiasm for the new project of a British Marxist Party.⁽²⁾ And when Hyndman began, he too knew enough to be very cautious.

At first in June, 1881, it was only a conference of London radicals and republicans that he called to establish his "Democratic Federation". As its name implied and its programmes seemed to witness, this was apparently to be merely a co-ordinating body for advanced radical societies. Although, apparently in the hope that conversion would be more likely and more lasting if occurring slowly and quietly in the study, he did no more in the way of socialist propaganda than present each member with a gold-embossed

-
1. Joseph Clayton: *The Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain, 1884-1924*, 10; H. W. Lee (and E. Archbold): *Social-Democracy in Britain*, 75 (a very full account).
 2. Nor, of course, did Engels: see *Marx-Engels Correspondence*, 419. Engels warns Bebel: "Do not on any account whatever let yourself be deluded into thinking there is a real proletarian movement going on here."

copy of his "England for All", he lost some supporters immediately. And although it was a full two years before he led the new organisation from the ordinary radical rut of protests against Irish co-ercion and Scottish crofter eviction to an openly socialist manifesto, he then lost many more. There was no longer any reason for delay: in January of the following year, 1884, "Justice" was begun with a loan of £300 from Edward Carpenter, the socialist poet-philosopher, and at the fourth Annual Conference in August by a unanimous vote the name of the Society was altered to "Social Democratic Federation". (3)

Thence-forward, the Federation was to keep closely to the Marxist dogma. Its 1883 manifesto combined a republican constitutional programme with a demand for nationalisation of the land and "other means of producing and distributing wealth". In 1884, when the separation - characteristic of Marxism - of "immediate" demands began, these included on this occasion State appropriation of railways, nationalisation of land, and State organisation of industry. The emphasis already marked was never to lack stress - that there must be no tinkering with the capitalist system, no mere palliatives, but only such reforms as would hasten its complete transformation. Even after the Taff Vale judgment the Federation would not divert its course in the slightest towards the

unions, but invited them to submerge their grievances into its own inspired policy. Hyndman apparently went so far, in fact, as to condemn the 1889 Dockers' Strike as being misguided: in a lecture delivered shortly after that great victory he was said to have declared that the energies of the strikers should have gone into revolution. (4)

There was little of the working-class in the composition of the SDF. Hyndman himself, famous for his frock coat and silk hat, was a contradiction of a man, a domineering but rather naive doctrinaire on the one hand, a shrewd gamin, taking delight in the follies of other Labour men, on the other. Although fighting the cause of the workers with sincerity evident to all who knew him well and spending a moderate fortune in the process, he never showed sign of understanding their viewpoint. He had only contempt for the unions. And he preserved his upper-class prejudices: even in working-class company he refused to eat from a roadside stall, and, although he enjoyed a good wine, censured some of the Federation most objectionably when they took part in a round or two of whisky during a train journey. (5)

(E. Belford^t Bax suggested that it would have been ostentatious of Hyndman to wear working-men's clothes; but his frock coat was at least equally ostentatious, and this hardly excuses

-
4. W. S. Sanders: *Early Socialist Days*, 78; Clayton, 10.
 5. Godfrey (Lord) Elton: *England Arise*, 74.

his tendency to dictate the social habits of the workers.) The group who signed the 1883 manifesto consisted of Bax, a scholar who had published translations/^{of} German philosophical works, H. H. Champion, ex-artillery officer, Hyndman, J. L. Joynes, a master at Eton, Helen Taylor, the step-daughter of John Stuart Mill, and three working-men - James Macdonald of the London Tailors (later Secretary of the London Trades Council), H. Quelch, a warehouseman earning 25/- a week in the dock area, and John E. Williams. (6) The executive of the following year included all of these with the exception of Joynes, Macdonald and Miss Taylor, and with the further addition of Dr. Edward and Eleanor Marx-Aveling, Robert Banner, for many years a prominent Scottish Radical and journalist, and John Burns. (7) Others prominent in the early years were Andreas Scheu, an Austrian brewery manager, C. L. Fitzgerald, ex-army officer and war correspondent, Frank Harris, later to be editor of the Fortnightly Review, Francis Adams, another writer, Edward Carpenter, who had been Cambridge fellow and curate before retiring to his small-holding near Sheffield to live the simple life and become socialist poet, (8) Henry S. Salt, another master at Eton,

6. Clayton, 14-16; Lee, 83.

7. Clayton, 14-16.

8. Carpenter is a most interesting figure and thinker: his ideas are collected chiefly in his "Civilisation - Its Cause and Cure", 1883. For an excellent evaluation see Elton, 75-79.

J. Hunter Watts, another university man and contributor to the periodicals, J. L. Mahon (18 when he left the SDF with the seceding group in 1884), a restless Labour political adventurer, and H. W. Lee, a stationer's clerk. Tom Mann joined in 1885 and John Ward, the navy, in 1886.⁽⁹⁾ In all this long list of 25 names there are only seven workers. And many of these were soon to become dissatisfied and leave the Federation.

As would be expected, the proportion of workers seems to have been higher among the rank and file: H. W. Lee, who became the Secretary of the Federation, claims that the bulk of the members were unskilled workers in 1885, paying as much as one or two shillings a week to the fund from their 20/- to 25/- earnings. And it was probably much higher in the provinces⁽¹⁰⁾, although there the SDF seems to have been much less rigidly Marxist. The Labour Emancipation League, which affiliated in 1884, one of its conditions being the definite adoption of socialism as the objective, contained a high proportion of workers, having a large following in the East End. (According to Lee, its leader, Joseph Lane, never overcame his distrust of Hyndman from the time in 1880 when he heard the latter advocate the restriction of the franchise,

-
9. Clayton, 16-18, 29; Lee, Chs. VIII-IX, p. 99. Lee, 93. W.S. Sanders: Early Socialist Days, 11-18, confirms this impression.
10. Carpenter: My Days and Dreams, 130ff, gives a sensitive picture of an early provincial group of socialists (at Sheffield).

to literates at the very least; at the schism a few months later the League also disaffiliated.) (11)

As it first got under way, the bark of the Federation was rather bigger than its bite. "Justice" could never have been started but for Carpenter's £300 (for some reason Morris would not put up the money) and the early numbers could not be sold. When, later in 1884, Morris, Hyndman and some others took the famous step of hawking copies in the Strand, this was intended to boost the sales and so extend the Federation, but achieved only a limited and temporary success. Moreover the Federation had the great advantage that Champion was a partner of the Modern Press in Paternoster Row, which issued "Justice", the monthly "Today", edited by Bax and Joynes, and the SDF penny pamphlets. Thus the volume of its propaganda belied its true strength. Lee confesses:

"It is indeed hard to know how the Democratic Federation would have fared in the matter of socialist literature without H. H. Champion, for he practically placed the Modern Press, which he was running with J. C. Foulger, at its disposal."

William Reeves, the Fleet Street publisher of advanced pamphlets and periodicals of all kinds, also gave considerable help. (12) And without "literature" there would scarcely have been many branches.

11. Lee, 43. Lee states (p. 50) that the Labour Emancipation League was formed in 1881.

12. Ibid., 57-8, 68.

In 1883 the number of branches of the old Democratic Federation was "very few"; before the changed objective and title were adopted in August, 1884, more were beginning to be formed - in Birmingham, Blackburn, Norwich, Leeds, Edinburgh, Bristol, Nottingham, and Glasgow for instance. (13) Ramsay MacDonald, who joined the Bristol branch in 1885, first had difficulty, however, in finding it. (14) Excellent publicity was received from newspaper attacks - the Radical press was particularly bitter - and especially from the famous Hyndman-Bradlaugh debate in April, 1884. But it was largely middle-class sympathisers - Mrs. Besant and J. Hunter Watts are examples - who were won over in this way. (15) On the other hand the method, first adopted at this time, of sending speakers to strike areas, such as to Blackburn and the mining districts of South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire, seems to have borne very little fruit. "Probably few of the miners," Lee admits, "knew or cared what the Socialists were after." (16) He even seems to suggest that the Hyde Park audiences were largely well-to-do. (17) And contemporary descriptions of

13. Ibid., 55, 64.

14. G. (Lord) Elton: Life of Ramsay MacDonald, 43.

15. Lee, 62-3.

16. Ibid., 59, 64.

17. Ibid., 66.

typical street-corner meetings inevitably stress their futility. (Carpenter thought that the miners were interested, but afraid to show interest - mob-feeling worked against the soap box). A course of lectures begun in Westminster by Aveling attracted a packed hall of the poorest class of workers at the beginning, but Aveling's matter was so far above their heads and his manner so repelling that the meetings petered out soon after they had started. New branches were forming in London at this time - in Tottenham, Edmonton, Wood Green, Finsbury Park, Paddington, Dayswater and Clerkenwell; but this extension was largely the work of the Labour Emancipation League. And despite heavy subsidies from Morris and Hyndman, funds were continually very low. (18)

Then, in the last few days of 1884, came the schism. It was the majority of the unwieldy, debating-society executive that resigned and withdrew, including Morris, the Avelings, Banner, Lane, Bax and Mahon. Champion, Burns, Burrows, Quelch and Williams remained with Hyndman. The split had come partly because the Federation was largely a head without a body: there was no membership to appeal to, no real means of arguing out the theoretical differences from experience. Since the Federation was not a political force, the charge

18. Ibid., 67-9. See Elton; Chs. II and IV for this early period.

of political opportunism made by the seceders was little more than academic. As they scarcely knew what the turmoil was about, the schism was a blow to the provincial branches, Leeds and Norwich among others going over to the new Socialist League and serious breaches appearing at Manchester and Leeds. (19)

As the two bodies continued their activities in 1885, it was more in^a spirit of friendly rivalry than of active animosity. Further good publicity was obtained at the end of January by the speeches of Burns, James MacDonald and John Williams at the Industrial Remuneration Conference called and backed by a Mr. Miller of Edinburgh for the purpose of discussing the distribution of income in the industrial system. More branches were opened.

True, Justice was still losing £10 a week, for all the fact that much of its matter was ready-made "stereo", bought to fill up the columns at least expense, and that much of the work of printing and publishing was done by the members. (Hyndman had practically exhausted his supply of money by the end of 1886, and his income had greatly declined from his neglect of his interests.) (20) But the Federation made a lot of noise.

So much noise, in fact, had the Federation managed to raise that, hoping to split the Liberal vote, the Conservatives

19. Lee, 70.

20. Ibid., 94, 131.

thought it worth while to provide enough money to enable it to run two candidates - John Williams in Hampstead, Fielding at Kensington - for the 1885 general election. In his spirited campaign for Nottingham West, Burns was financed, Champion being the intermediary, by a Mr. W. Hudson, a wealthy soap manufacturer with leanings of sympathy towards socialism. With the backing of a good committee, including two men - Harry Snell and Joseph Burgess, who were to be prominent in the Labour movement proper in later years, Burns did win some real support. That he polled only 598 votes was due to the fact that so few of his supporters had electors' qualifications. (21)

The results for the other two candidates were disgracefully poor: Williams received 27 votes, Fielding 32. This was a crushing revelation of the true extent of the Federation's influence. The Tories had thrown their money away. The reputation of the Federation would have been shattered, if it had possessed one: one writer suggests that the blow was softened by the fact that most of the press published the results with the Liberal (L) after the names of the three SDF men, and also by the Tory habit of charging all their opponents with being socialists in any case. (22)

21. See especially Lord Snell: *Men, Movements and Myself*, 63-4.

22. S. Macoby: *English Radicalism, 1853-86*, 337.

Certainly the Federation was undaunted, and it was soon able to give the impression of achieving greatly enhanced prestige. When the Great Depression returned to its most severe levels in the winter of 1885-6, Federation street orators were able to assume the leadership of the many thousands of the London unemployed. Although Burns and Williams had led a demonstration to Whitehall before the onset of the winter, this was apparently not an official Federation function, and in fact it seems that it was a matter of some months before that body realised its opportunity. But then it certainly did attract nation-wide attention. Even so, it was at a Trafalgar Square meeting organised by a rival body, the Fair Trade League, that the Federation became famous when Burns led the rioting mob to Hyde Park and, together with Champion, Hyndman and Williams, obtained the use of the dock at the Old Bailey as a soap box. The West End was in consternation; the newspapers gravely discussed the possibility of violent revolution; the Lord Mayor's Relief Fund, which had been dawdling indifferently at a few thousand pounds, swelled almost immediately to

£39,000. (23)

23. Lee, Ch. XIII; see also Marx-Engels Correspondence, 445: Kautsky, who was there, stated that the Federation audience were riff-raff who took no real interest in the speeches.

Yet, for all their unending, irrational optimism, the SDF were as surprised as anyone else at these developments. At their meeting on the night of the riots, the discussion was so excited that the regular work could not be done and no real decision could be reached; the following morning they were immensely and justifiably amused at the Echo's placards that Burns was marching upon the West End at the head of 60,000 men. (24) The demonstrations were continued; whatever the reason (disputed by the authorities, (25)) for the military drilling of followers carried out by Champion and Quelch in East End backyards, the possibility of revolution by violence was seriously discussed: Hyndman took the precaution of carrying a list of the names of his cabinet in his pocket. (26) But the unemployed were puzzled when SDF orators concluded a tirade pointing out the inevitability of a complete overturning of the whole capitalist system with a request to disband the meeting in orderly fashion.

Further branches were formed, the Federation again made ground. But when the Depression began to recede and the unemployed agitation died away, it was seen to have brought practically no permanent adherents. Although they

24. Lee, 113.

25. Mann: Memoirs, 63-4, claims it was for revolution; cp. Lee, 126.

26. See also Carpenter: My Days and Dreams, 246.

had accepted the Federation as leaders for the time, the out-of-work, and all the others who had watched these events, had apparently attached no great value to its doctrines. For a few months longer the Federation made a splash, but again it was with a borrowed following. Alarmed at the demonstrations, the Home Office decided to prohibit the use of Trafalgar Square, an action which temporarily rallied the London Radical clubs to Hyndman's support. The result - "Bloody Sunday", November 13, 1887 - when Burns and Cunningham-Graham were arrested after marching with huge contingents from the suburbs and breaking through the police cordon⁽²⁷⁾, was a Radical more than a SDF affair. The marching detachments that set out to challenge the authorities were mostly Radicals; the purpose of the demonstration was Radical to condemn Irish co-ercion and particularly the treatment in prison of William O'Brien and other political prisoners. The Radicals were ready, as always, to support the principle of free speech, but it was the Federation that usually won the limelight and the credit.⁽²⁸⁾ At about the same time the Radical clubs also gave aid in the "Dod Street affair", - a similar brief

27. Carpenter had a friend, an innocent bystander, who was batoned during this incident (ibid., 256).

28. There is no mention of "Bloody Sunday" in Lee, and Hyndman (Record of an Adventurous Life, 400) comments: "(The West End riots)... are frequently mixed up with the meeting on 'Bloody Sunday'... the circumstances of the case were, however, quite different."

agitation arising from police prohibition of certain sparsely attended meetings held on Sunday mornings in a side street in the East End -- but these meetings soon melted away into their previous insignificance as soon as the police ceased to interfere.

The wonder is that the Federation -- and the League -- did not make very much more progress as the result of all this excellent publicity. In 1887 the Federation's total membership was less than 700 and the League was smaller. (29) As a result of the unemployed demonstration, which had actually taxed the society's funds instead of aiding them, the Secretary's salary had dropped into arrears, and it was to be ten years later before this debt was to be paid off. (30) This may have been one reason why the unemployed agitations were not continued, although Lee goes rather out of his way to suggest that the Federation was merely making use of these demonstrations -- if this was so, the victims may well have come to suspect it -- and that it was not primarily interested in the condition of those out of work:

"With this demonstration (of Feb. 27, 1887, in St. Paul's Cathedral) the phase of spectacular agitation by the SDF among and on behalf of the unemployed may be said to pass -- at any rate for the time. It had been exploited to the full, and to have continued it would have been to run the risk of an anti-climax. (Such demonstrations)

29. Clayton, 29. Elton (op. cit., 83) has an estimate of about 500 for 1885.

30. Lee, 116.

took on a more local form... There were, however, a number of meetings of the unemployed held in Trafalgar Square, and towards the close of the year, when the number of those out of work was increased by seasonal slackness, they became both frequent and unorganised." (31)

Among the 700 of the 1887 total membership were included many branches, particularly in Lancashire, which often refused to follow the London "party line". Apparently, they were not altogether Marxist. The Federation was strongest in Lancashire while, curiously, the Socialist League had most branches in Yorkshire. The Federation also obtained a footing in South Wales, and strong branches were established in Birmingham and Northampton. Edinburgh was making progress; in Glasgow there were "ten or a dozen" branches at one time, but this was an over-optimistic extension that could not be maintained. (32) Sent to Northumberland and Durham during the miners' strike of 1887, Tom Mann made good progress for a time, three Socialist members being elected to the Newcastle School Board. But most of the branches formed in the mining villages dwindled away and collapsed once the heat of the strike had passed. His salary fell into arrears, London could not keep up its subsidies; he had to sell his books and furniture to meet the needs of his family. Invited to Bolton in 1888 to

11. Lee, 119.

12. Ibid., 120-122.

organise the Lancashire movement, he was set up in a tobacconist's shop; but this was soon a failure. No other salary was available and there was dissension among the members (Mann says some of them wanted to establish a small-scale Socialist commonwealth immediately. (33)) In early 1889, therefore, he accepted the offer of a position as a private inspector to detect breaches of the Factory Acts for a London committee in which Thomas Sutherst - a middle-class sympathiser who was later to organise the busmen - was prominent. (This was probably one of Champion's projects: he was Secretary of a Shop Hours Regulation Act Committee at this time, and Mann acted as one of his agents shortly afterwards, secretly obtaining a labourer's post in Mond's chemical works to gain evidence of the conditions there.) (34) So much for the strength of the movement in the provinces!

And so the street-corner meetings continued, senselessly futile, apparently without result. The description has been recorded of the first open-air meeting in Bristol, which did not arrest even a single passer-by (35) and there are several accounts of the usual Victoria Park procedure; with the

33. This comment suggests that many of them were middle-class, as community projects were always middle-class inspired.
 34. Mann: *Memoirs*, 65-73; Lee, 123; *Labour Elector*, Feb. 23, 1889, 15.
 35. S. Bryher; *An Account of the Labour and Socialist Movement in Bristol*, 23.

audience of 20, 30 or a hundred, inevitably comprising a mixture of the curious sight-seers, the mildly interested, the circle of the faithful - gathered on the inside to draw the rest - and the solitary, hotly argumentative, unquenchable, cranky critic. Even at the dock gates, where Burns and others tried morning after morning to strike a flame among the most oppressed, there was hardly a spark of response. (36)

As a result, many wearied of unending futility and left the Federation. In 1887, when his proposal that the unemployed should encamp in Trafalgar Square was rejected, Champion resigned and proceeded to Scotland, where he became active among the Scottish Land and Labour League. (37) John Ward turned away in 1888 to found his Navvies' Union, never again to have any trust in socialism. Burns was an uneasy follower long before his breach on reaching the London County Council in 1889; Tom Mann too was working with Champion by then. (38)

For much the same reasons, the Socialist League proceeded on much the same sort of course. The number of branches increased very slowly, and so did the membership: its appeal was only to the small handful of Labour dreamers to be found amidst each agglomeration of the community. Its

36. See especially A. Besant: Autobiography.
 37. Clayton, 29; see also W. S. Sanders; Early Socialist Days, 26.
 38. Clayton, 29; Mann: Memoirs, 77.

outdoor meetings were equally as futile as those of the SDF: three quarters of the regular Hammersmith Sunday morning audience disappeared precisely at one o'clock when the public-houses opened. (39) And one wonders, on reading that H. G. Wells was often in the lecture hall at Kelmescott House in a "crowd of students" (40), for the Sunday evening meetings, how many in those audiences were equally middle-class. It had the same financial strain: without liberal subsidies from Morris, its journal "Commonweal" could never have continued. Its circulation in July, 1888, was 2800 and it was being published at a loss of £4 a week, over and above the regular £2 subsidy. And a good deal of the matter was "stereo". Morris was contributing £500 a year to the League by about 1890. (41)

For Morris particularly the cause was hopeless after Bloody Sunday, November, 1887. Firmly believing that politics corrupted, he had been convinced that the old order must be swept away in its entirety, and therefore that this must be done suddenly, by violent revolution. On that day, when the ranks of "comrades" quavered and fled at the very sight of the cordon of police, Morris learned that he would never see the revolution. His faith was gone

39. J. B. Glasier: William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement, 114-5.

40. H. G. Wells: Experiment in Autobiography, 250-1, 265.

41. Glasier, 193, 201.

irredeemably. (42) Meanwhile his League was slipping into the control of the anarchists as, without firm basis in the working class, it was readily able to do.

Considerable light is thrown upon the movement by Morris's position within it. For all his origins, situation and education, Morris seems more of a working man than a great many Labour leaders. His easy-going good nature, his unaffected delight in simple working-clothes, his humility, his enjoyment of the use of his hands, and of the pleasure of creating things, the thoroughness of his craftsmanship (he would learn each new process from the very bottom) and his sense of the satisfaction it brought, his mad outbursts of temper, his intemperance of language, his very poetry - the product of craftsmanship in poetics rather than inspiration - all seem more typical of the intelligent artisan than of any other social group. His was an earthy but not a voluptuous or deeply intellectual sensitiveness. In many respects he might seem the soul of a working man.

Despite his tendency, probably a result of his singular humility, to be influenced too easily by others, his thought lacked the Marxian rigidity. (A little ruefully, he once referred to his collaboration with Bax in their writing of "Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome", as his daily

"Baxination". (43) He never could read economics.

Undoubtedly he was unpractical, but at many points his thought had a subtle lack of dogma about it that reminds one of Hardie. Many later leaders of the ILP speak of the depth of the impression he made upon them in a manner they could never use of Hyndman, Quelch or Aveling. Indeed he seems to have had a considerable influence upon the early thought of the ILP.

So similar in fact was his outlook to Hardie's that one wonders why Hardie's teaching achieved so much more. There are of course the differences - in message as well as circumstances: Morris's over-fastidious abhorrence of participation in politics, his association with Bax and Aveling, and the fact that he was not a good platform man. He saw all politics as corrupting; Hardie feared only the corruption of association with the Liberals. And in the last analysis he was not a worker, and could never quite see with a worker's eye. The characteristic that told against him most was undoubtedly his unpracticality - his insistence upon revolution. (This in itself was one mark of the class gulf between him and the workers: it has always been middle-class sympathisers that have advised the workers to revolt,

43. Glasier, 143.

and have lacked confidence in the ability of their M.P.s to resist the social blandishments of Westminster).

By 1890, the socialist societies had accomplished very little. Probably they had helped to stimulate the Labour movement into a more conscious analysis of its discontent with the social-economic order; but there is little or no evidence that they hastened its adoption of independent political action to any notable extent. There had been little trace of their influence in the first stirrings within the TUCs of the mid-eighties; the Socialist League was now dying out; although the SDF was to expand greatly in the nineties, having 86 branches in 1895, and making further large gains in 1898-9, when it claimed about 150 branches and trebled its income compared with the 1893 figure, this growth seems to be less a cause of the new political movement than one of its results. (44) The ILP had become much more significant. (Even in 1892, Lansbury remembered, the Bow and Bromley SDF Branch often had their open-air meetings to themselves. When in 1895 he contested a by-election in the constituency, the Federation was very confident that at last it would win a seat: he polled 347 votes!.) (45)

44. The Labour Year Book, 1895, 48-59, 214-9; 1899, 76; 1900, 86.

45. Lansbury: My Life, 78, 110. Lansbury's election meetings had been thronged, however, but only with the voteless: he thought he could have won under universal suffrage. He also states that the members of the Branch were "all in good jobs".

The best of William Morris's many virtues was probably his self-searching honesty. Perhaps his judgment best sums up the work of the early socialists. In a personal letter of May, 1885, to a friend he wrote:

"On Sunday I went a-preaching Stepney way..... You would perhaps have smiled at my congregation; some twenty people in a little room, as dirty as convenient, and stinking a good deal. It took the fire out of my fine periods, I can tell you; it is a great drawback that I can't talk to them roughly and unaffectedly. Also I would like to know what amount of real feeling underlies their bombastic revolutionary talk when they get to that. I don't seem to have got at them yet. You see this great class gulf lies between us."(46)

And in his last article in *Commonweal*, in November, 1890;

"Consider the quality of those who began and carried on this business of reversing the basis of modern society. A few working-men, less successful even in the wretched life of labour than their fellows; a sprinkling of the intellectual proletariat...; one or two outsiders in the game political; a few refugees from the bureaucratic tyranny of foreign governments; and here and there an unpractical, half-cracked artist or author.....

"When I first joined the movement, I hoped that some working-man leader, or rather leaders, would turn up, who would push aside all middle-class help, and become great historical figures. I might still hope for that, if it seemed likely to happen, for indeed I long for it enough; but to speak plainly it does not seem so at present... (He had imagined) great dramatic events which would make our lives tragic indeed, but would take us out of the sordidness of the so-called 'peace' of civilisation. (Now he was confronted with the) vulgarized realization."(47)

46. A. Clutton-Brook: *William Morris, his Work and Influence*, 158.

47. *Ibid.*, 166-70.

CHAPTER 9.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE
FABIAN SOCIETY.

A serious difficulty facing the leaders of the revolt of Labour from Liberalism was their lack of a satisfactory and sufficiently coherent political philosophy. As has been seen again and again in previous chapters, for all their allegiance to the Liberals in the seventies and eighties, the workers had never really been won over to economic individualism. Yet they had no systematised, presentable alternative of their own. As it became vaguely known, Marxism was stimulating them and helping to verbalise much of the dissatisfaction they had sensed towards the Radical policies of mere political reform; but it had few constructive suggestions to offer. And the doctrinaire logic of Marxism was more than they could stomach; the SDF was never likely to win many recruits in Britain. Yet the Labour politicians and the unionists were collectivists - would it be possible to find a logical position somewhere between Radicalism and Marxism? This pressing need of a Labour political philosophy was partly met by the work of the Fabian Society.

As is well known, the Fabian Society was the off-shoot of a "Fellowship of the New Life" founded on October 24, 1883,

as the result of a lecture in London, just before his return to the United States, by an American Scot, Thomas Davidson. Davidson's thought appears to have been somewhat along the lines of Robert Owen. The "New Life", he told his London audience, would require them to unite

"for the purpose of common living as far as possible on a communistic basis, realising among themselves the higher life and making it a primary care to provide a worthy education for the young."

But the emphasis was almost entirely upon the "spiritual" side of existence, the suggested community being only a device to escape as far as possible from the materialism of the existing world:

"I shall set out with two assumptions, first, that human life does not consist in material possession; and second, that it does consist in free spiritual activity, of which in this life at least material possession is an essential condition."

As the result of Davidson's lecture, it was decided to form the Fellowship to discuss his ideas, and fortnightly meetings were begun. Although the project of an actual community was examined - Davidson had never quite reached the point of suggesting that one be established - it was condemned as impracticable from the first. (1)

Three at least of the original group, H. H. Champion, J. L. Joynes, and Hubert Bland, were members of the SDF and

1. E. R. Pease: History of the Fabian Society, 26-31; Elton: England Arise, 102-4.

one of them, Champion, was now appointed head of the committee to draw up a statement of the purposes of the Fellowship. The suggestion he reported back to the group was virtually socialist:

"The members of the Society assert that the Competitive System assures the happiness and comfort of the few at the expense of the suffering of the many, and that Society must be reconstituted in such a manner as to secure the general welfare and happiness."

But was the problem social and political or moral and spiritual? At once there was disagreement on this issue. The Fellowship continued in existence (until 1898) to examine the moral side, several of its members, notably Ramsay MacDonald, who was its Secretary in 1896-7, being also Fabians, while on January 4, 1884, the majority set up a separate body, the Fabian Society, to discuss the social and economic aspect, and thus "to help on the reconstruction of Society in accordance with the highest moral principles." (2)

Significantly, the title adopted, which was explained as an allusion to Fabius Cunctator, the Roman general who followed a policy of judicious delay, was meant to contrast with Hyndman's doctrine that revolution must be precipitated - despite the fact that the Society included several SDF members. Although the parallel between Fabius and the conception of constitutional gradualism for which the Society became famous was not very close, the name served well enough. Probably

the main point of interest is that this unashamedly middle-class group should already be so conscious of the Federation's brand of socialism, and that they should have decided on the tactics of gradualism before Bernard Shaw and Sidney Webb had joined them. As yet, Pease believed, although they were aware of Marx none of the group had assimilated Marxism. But almost from the beginning -- certainly from March 21, when a paper was read on "The Two Socialisms", contrasting the Society's conceptions with the doctrines of the Federation -- they were consciously non-Marxist socialists. (3)

Nevertheless, Bernard Shaw, who attended his first meeting on May 16 and became a member on September 5, claims that in the early years they were as revolutionary as the SDF in outlook. In so far as they meant to promote the change to socialism by research and legislation, the Fabians were already on the path they were to follow for many years, but as yet, although he and Wallas were the only two members who practised street-corner oratory, they expected to have only to bring home the logic of socialism to the nation for the new order to appear. Their activities, he states, were based

"on the tacit assumption that the object of our campaign, with its watchwords 'Educate, Agitate, Organise' was to bring about a tremendous smash-up of existing society, to be succeeded by complete Socialism." (4)

3. Ibid., 24-5, 37.

4. G. B. Shaw: The Fabian Society. What it has done and how it has done it..., 4-7.

In the light of the other evidence, this statement seems typically exaggerated. But it does appear to show that as yet their ideas were only half-formed. Certainly all that the Fabians seem to have brought to socialism in their first few years were Shaw's wit and a refusal to indulge in vague emotionalism. Although these contributions in themselves were novel and valuable enough, and show that Fabianism had already entered upon its characteristic course, much more was to come.

On May 1, 1885, almost a year after Shaw's first appearance, the vital element was brought into the Society when he introduced Sidney Webb, whom he had fastened upon at a meeting of the Zeletical Society, a debating association preoccupied with Darwinism, Spencerism and Free Thought, as "the ablest man in England".⁽⁵⁾ Sydney Olivier was also elected at the same meeting, and Graham Wallas followed about a year later.⁽⁶⁾ In a short time the Society had effectively become the organ of Sidney Webb, his outstanding research ability being fortunately supplemented by the great gifts of these three close colleagues. In "1885 or early 1886" the leading Fabians formed another group, the Hampstead Historic Society, for the study of "Kapital". From this exercise the doctrinal basis of Fabian gradualism emerged. The findings

5. G. B. Shaw: Sixteen Self Sketches, 56.

6. Elton, 65; Pease, 40, 46-7.

of the Historic Society were that on his own ground of historical science Marx was demonstrably wrong: that in fact socialism was an inevitable product of economic evolution, and that it had already reached an advanced stage. The economic theory of "Kapital" was palpably inadequate: orthodox economics itself demonstrated the march and necessity of the new collectivist order. By revealing the presence of rents in all kinds of economic activity, it justified and in fact showed the necessity of extensive interference by the state. (7)

As socialists, the Fabians determined to take a part in this historical process - a special Political Committee set up at about the end of 1886 in deference to the wishes of a minority to remain a mere study group was soon found superfluous, as the main work of the Society inevitably became political. (8) Since a good deal of private property had already been taken by the state or private business activity subjected to a large measure of state regulation, merely from the necessity of national efficiency, it followed that by merely pointing out where greater efficiency was required, the Fabians would achieve socialism through the existing political parties. For this purpose they would

7. Pease, 64.

8. Ibid., 68-9.

"permeate" political organisations so as to be able to influence their policies: there would be little point in forming a separate party. As civil servants, Webb and Olivier could suggest the details that needed attention; Shaw's great gift for giving reforms the appearance of obvious necessities would add force to their facts and figures. But little emphasis was needed in any case: the facts spoke for themselves. The Fabians had no difficulty in showing that, far from being a fantasy, socialism was a more natural, more common-sense principle of community organisation than the individualist dogma that still survived in current political thought.

It was thus as the Hampstead Historic study group reached its findings that Fabianism proper really began. Just previously, in June, 1886, the Fabians had invited all who were interested to a conference modelled on the Industrial Remuneration Conference of the previous year, only to find that they had nothing to tell the Radicals. In the same month they had also published "A Report on the Government Organisation of Unemployed Labour", the first of the Tracts to follow the typically Fabian method of diligent collection and lucid analysis of facts. But this pamphlet had attracted little attention, because Webb, who was its author, was still

groping towards the Fabian political philosophy.⁽⁹⁾ Six months later, however, in January, 1887, when "Facts for Socialists" appeared, the Society suddenly became a force. A masterly collection by Webb of quotations from the standard economists which showed that poverty was due not to individual deficiencies but the operation of the economic system itself, this pamphlet established Fabianism as a system of thought. It provided a constructive case for socialism that Englishmen could, and had to, consider seriously. In June, having found their feet at last, the Fabians adopted their famous "basis" which confidently began: "The Society consists of Socialists..."⁽¹⁰⁾

The next step was to make a fuller statement of their case, and thus the preparation was now begun of the series of lectures, delivered in the summer of 1888, which were to be collected as the "Fabian Essays in Socialism". Meanwhile the policy of "permeation" was put into practice, no fewer than 721 lectures being delivered by 31 Fabians in the year ending March, 1889, mostly to London Radical Workingmen's Clubs. And in early 1889, virtually without the voters realising what was happening, the "Progressive" victory on the new London County Council was achieved. There were actually no Fabians among the successful candidates, but it

9. Ibid., 55.

10. Ibid., 69-71.

was the Society's policy that had swept the poll and set the pattern for the administration of modern London.(11)

At Christmas, 1889, a few months after the excitement of the Dock Strike, which doubtless helped to give the book popularity, "Essays in Socialism" appeared. Although the modest, slim, competently produced volume received no publicity, two thousand copies had been sold by the following March. Then a second shilling edition sold 25,000 copies within a year. The Fabians had caught the ear of the British public - a remarkable feat as, apart from Mrs Besant, none of the authors had any reputation.(12) And in September and October, 1890, they were able by means of a gift of £200 from Mr. H. H. Hutchinson, a sympathiser, to follow up this success with the "Lancashire Campaign" of sixty lectures. Carefully prepared, these were delivered mainly to Workingmen's Clubs and were planned to show Northern working-class Radicals that socialism was something less than bloody revolution and something more than airy idealism.(13)

Despite the success of the Essays, Fabianism did not become a national movement. Since, according to its own teaching, there was no need to form a separate party, the Society deliberately remained a small research group,

-
- 11. Pease, 77.
 - 12. Ibid., 88.
 - 13. Ibid., 95.

unconcerned with increasing its membership. In 1886 it had numbered only 87; in March 1891 between 350 and 400; in March, 1894 681 (417 in London); and it was not until after the 1905 election that the parent body in London had more than a thousand members. (14) When a number of provincial groups were now formed, these were not by any means discouraged, particularly as they could do valuable work in drawing up political programmes for local bodies, whose function the Fabians thought especially important in the march of collectivism. But there was no attempt to weld them into any sort of national political organisation. The parent group merely maintained contact with them and sent them lecturers and material. Although many of these provincial Societies contained a large middle-class element, they were composed of working men to a much greater extent than the London group, and immediately showed a desire for more direct political methods. They were in fact more properly part of the new independent Labour political movement that was coming into existence at this period. Within a few years of the formation of the ILP, almost every one of the seventy Fabian groups that had appeared by that time

14. Elton, 110; Pease, 99; Labour Annual, 1895, 36, and later Annuals.

went over to the new body. (15)

What part had the Fabian Society played in bringing this quickly spreading independent political movement into existence? As has been seen in earlier chapters, there were signs in the Trades Union Congresses that the movement was beginning to emerge as early as 1885 - before the Fabians had completed their analysis and become known. Thus the movement had at least begun without any stimulus from Fabianism. Hardie, as will be seen, had found his feet as a non-Marxist socialist without Fabian assistance; Champion, who appears to have taken no part in the Society after the first few meetings, seems to have drawn up his plan for a completely independent Labour Party on his own initiative - he was probably in touch with the Society's activities, but in fact the Fabians were opposed to independent political action. And, as also will become evident later, the workers were never able to make sense of "permeation", which left them always suspicious of the Society. Moreover, the Society

15. Pease, 99-102. Pease states that the provincial branches went over to the ILP within a year, but there were still 58 listed in the 1895 Labour Annual (48-59, 214-9), distributed in similar fashion to the ILP branches, with 46 outside London. This does not compare very satisfactorily, however, with the figure for March, 1894, given previously that there were 264 members in the provinces: possibly many of these branches had linked with the ILP but had not yet altered their title. Pease also states that there were only 8 branches of the Society in 1900, half of these at Universities, but the report in the 1901 Labour Annual (p. 29) lists 15.

for its part seems never to have had a high opinion of the workers' capabilities.

On the other hand, Fabian socialism did give give substance and form to the empirical collectivism that had so far had to do duty for an independent Labour policy, and thus added greatly to its appeal. But in so doing it did little more. Long before Fabianism was invented, the political thought of trade unionists had been on Fabian lines - collectivist, gradualist and constitutionalist - but had merely not been systematised. Hardie had drawn it together into his own brand of socialism - and, like Fabianism, Hardie's socialism was derived from Radicalism, and was pragmatic, flexible, and undoctinaire. The Fabians did not create the socialism of the British Labour movement, as eventually adopted by the Labour Party. It was already in existence - in Hardie's mind and, implicitly, in the beliefs of trade unionists; they gave it coherence and propaganda material. (16) In contributing greater clarity and force, however, they must have greatly aided its spread. As is shown surely by the number of the new bodies that at first adopted the name of "Fabian Society", the force of the Fabian analysis was well appreciated and must have made many converts.

16. Cp. G. D. H. Cole: James Keir Hardie, 34: "The Fabians did not invent this British socialism... it made itself, out of the stuff of contemporary society, beginning where the more progressive impulses of Liberalism left off."

But even more valuable were Fabian administrative experience and research. Between 1889 and 1893 the Society distributed three-quarters of a million tracts, including twenty thousand copies of its draft for an Eight Hours Bill. Although the workers could make no sense of permeation, Fabian facts and figures demonstrated what they had only been able to feel, and transformed Labour speeches from empty assertion into cogent argument. At every street corner meeting the Fabians heard their own material quoted.

And for all its rejection of the policy of independence, which was largely theoretical and not to be exaggerated, the Society did supply direct and valuable help to the new movement. It distributed boxes of books to the provincial Fabian Societies and, when they had disappeared, to ILP branches and any other organisation that cared to use them - 93 of these boxes were in circulation in 1898, containing 2250 volumes, and twenty more were being prepared. It answered legal and local government enquiries, and in 1899 co-operated with the ILP in setting up a Local Government Bureau. In 1896-7, with funds bequeathed by Hutcheson, it sent out lecturers who spoke 180 times in fifty towns, with the result that many new ILP branches were formed and others greatly stimulated. Until Ruskin College was founded in 1900, it provided correspondence courses in economics and trade

unionism. In 1892 it raised £152 for the expenses of Tillet's parliamentary campaign in Bradford; and in 1895 it raised similar funds for Ramsay MacDonald and Fred Hammill. (1)

For a time, in fact, the Society appeared to lose its faith in permeation and give direct support to the independent Labour policy. In the famous 1893 article "To Your Tents, O Israel" in which the Fabians rebuked the Liberal Party for its failure to implement the "Newcastle Programme" of 1892 - which had seemed at the time the greatest triumph of the permeation policy - the Society advised the workers to raise £30,000 to return fifty of their own men to Parliament.

(As the article pointed out, even preoccupation with Irish affairs in Parliament could not excuse the Government's failure to carry out administrative reforms, such as the insertion of "fair wages" clauses in public contracts). The following year Shaw elaborated the scheme in a pamphlet entitled "A Plan of Campaign for Labour". (There was, of course, nothing novel in this suggestion!) But this seems to have been only a temporary departure from the traditional Fabian attitude. In fact the Webbs appear to have lost interest in the trade unions in the late nineties; the Fabians took little part in the formation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900; and certainly in 1907

17. Ibid., 84, 113, 123-5; Labour Annuals, 1896, 25; 1898, 67; 1900, 63.

H. G. Wells was unable to convince Shaw and Webb that "Make Socialists and you will make Socialism; there is no other way".

The truth is that the Fabians were never in close sympathy with the aspirations of the independent Labour movement in its formative period, so that the help they gave it was largely incidental. Even in 1916, in writing his history of the Society, Pease unconsciously gives evidence of the failure of the Fabians to appreciate the Labour viewpoint by remarking: "English Socialists have always paid great and perhaps excessive attention to the problem of unemployment" - surely no working-class writer could ever have suggested that unemployment could receive excessive attention. (18)

The parent Society in London was almost entirely middle-class. It represented the "middle-class conscience" movement at its zenith. Although it included a large number who were also prominent in other advanced social reform organisations which had some contact with the Labour movement - such as the Rev. Stewart Headlam and Frederick Verinder, both of whom were the real leaders of both the Guild of St. Mathew and the English Land Restoration League - these themselves were middle-class bodies, and not very closely

connected with unionism. A few trades unionists and ILP men, Hardie for instance, were Fabians (in fact all the 15 ILP candidates in the 1895 general election were Fabians, in addition to four Liberal candidates and an independent), but this was largely for the purpose of more readily obtaining Fabian material. R. E. Delli and W. S. de Mattos, who were prominent among the London "new" unions, were elected to the Fabian Society executive in 1890; but again, these two men were "middle-class helpers" (the usual working-class term).⁽¹⁹⁾ When ILP members objected, as they often did, to the declared Fabian policy that it might in some cases be advisable to support a candidate from one of the other parties against an independent labour man who had no chance of success, they were unable to force a change of attitude. (This Fabian detachment was, however, a mere expression of theory, and never actually acted upon). Although Tom Mann was on close terms with the Fabians from about 1892 to 1894, partly because of his interest in municipal government, and Webb wrote the minority report of the Labour members of the Royal Commission on Labour in the nineties, these were isolated incidents. Labour men accepted Fabian help, especially in matters of detail, but only when they agreed with the Fabians on the broad principles involved. The Engineers showed no interest in Webb's advice during their lock-out

19. *Ibid.*, 93; Labour Annual, 1896, 25.

of 1897.

The truth was that the Fabians were too intellectualist to achieve closer relations with the Labour movement. They did not take sufficient account of the irrational element in politics. In the first place "permeation" could never have satisfied the workers, for half at least of their motivation was the simple desire to see their own men in Parliament. It was not enough for them that reforms be enacted: they wanted to enact them for themselves, and to have their own class at the controls of the state to ensure that their interests would be adequately considered whenever national decisions were taken. Similarly, it might well be argued that they wanted nationalisation less in the interests of national efficiency than because they felt they were the rightful owners of the means of production. Although the Fabians were ahead of their period in the advance of democratic thought through their realisation that a greater, more human degree of economic equality was necessary (they were not, as has sometimes been suggested, merely in search of efficiency for its own sake - the nature of the reforms they proposed demonstrates this), they failed to realise the strength or the character of the psychological forces that lay behind the demand for full self-government. Although Webb had stated that there would never be a particular day

when one could say that socialism had arrived, the day when a Labour Government took office would certainly be to the workers a great watershed in history.

In addition, the Fabians over-estimated the "permeability" of the two traditional political parties.

Neither Liberals nor Tories would of themselves go much further in advancing collectivism, even for reasons of national efficiency. In fact they would not go as far as would really suit the material interests of their own supporters: the motivation of politics was power more even than wealth. Hardie's jibe that they could no more expect to permeate the Liberal Party than a lamb could permeate a den of lions was much more to the point than Webb's insensitive remark on this same issue that the British practice was the two-party system - a party of progress and a party of conservatism. Little wonder that the Labour movement found itself unable to trust the Fabians. The workers' intensity of feeling made this impossible, especially when, even after the manifest failure of permeation by 1893, the Society did not alter its political tactics. And later, when the Taff Vale judgment was pronounced, the Fabians found it difficult not to approve of it! They could not frame an acceptable solution to the problem its posed.

After 1895, in fact, the Society seems to have exercised little influence on labour policy. Its Hutchinson lecturers of 1896-7, Harry Snell and S. D. Shallard, were really ILP men, and founded ILP branches. Apart from those ^{the} universities and colonies, there was only a handful of branches at the turn of the century. (20) As was stated previously, the Society took little part in the formation of the IRC, Pease being permitted to take a seat upon the Executive, but merely because of his personal interest. The work of the Local Government Bureau, though valuable, was off the mainstream of development. The Fabian Tracts of this period dealt with fields that were of little interest to the Labour politician; for the moment the Webbs had lost their interest in the unions; and the attitude of the Fabian Junta on the question of the Boer War, on which they were vaguely "imperialist", also served to divide them from the Labour movement, and was the cause of several resignations, including that of Ramsay MacDonald. (21) When revival after 1905 eventually restored the Society to a position of policy-making importance within the Labour movement, this development was a result of the election victory of that year, to which it had not contributed, and belongs to another period in Labour history.

20. See note (15) above.
21. Clayton, 47.

CHAPTER 10.

THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE LEGAL EIGHT HOURS DAY
AS AN INDEX TO THE NEW MOVEMENT:

THE MINERS.

(a). The Legal Eight Hours Campaign.

It has been remarked that it was on the question of the eight hours bill that the "old" unionists took up their stand in opposition to the advanced movement in the Trades Union Congresses of the 1880's. In so doing they acted, as has been seen, more from considerations of tactical expediency than from any faith in individualism as a political philosophy. Although their justification of legislative "interference" in other matters on "exceptional" grounds of safety or the inability of the workers concerned to protect themselves was rather transparent, the question of working hours did seem perilously close to that of wage rates. And the unionists were understandably reluctant to give the capitalist Parliament the excuse to determine wages. In fact, for all the helplessness of the women and children on whose behalf the Congresses had otherwise been so ready to ask for "interference", the unionists had never for this reason attempted to seek a legal minimum wage for them.

But how far can the increasing strength of the eight hours vote in the Congresses be accepted as a measure of the

growth of the advanced party? To what extent was the issue itself typical of the difference between them? What proportion of the unions that voted for an eight hours bill were in general agreement with the "new" party; what proportion of those who voted against it were consistently on the more reactionary side?

Apart from the principle of interference or non-interference involved, the eight hours issue has both merits and demerits as an instance of the divergence between the two wings of the Labour movement. In the first place, the eight hours movement was certainly one symptom of a new spirit of aggressiveness. As has already been pointed out of the seventies, the nine hours movement of that time, although conducted entirely in the industrial field, was rightly seen by the employers as an attempt to make the economic machine serve the workers - it was a revulsion from *laissez-faire*. It was an interference with the natural order of things; and this was why it seemed immoral. Nevertheless, although their judgment was sound, it could well be protested that the ten hours day of that time was a positive imposition on the worker, and that nine hours was only as much as could reasonably be expected of a man if he was to be a man at all, and not a mere beast of burden whose work was his sole existence. The eight hour day, however, meant going a step

beyond this point. It could hardly be pleaded on grounds of general fairness or justice, but represented, to a large extent, an endeavour to make a more positive gain from the machine - a gain of leisure purely for its own sake. (1)

Certainly there were many occupations, such as the railway workers, which had not yet won the nine hours day and in some cases worked a good deal longer than this. And it was partly on their behalf that the need was urged. But it was also urged at least as much for nine-hours workers. Moreover the unions which opposed the "legal" movement, many of which had long been working the nine hours, asserted that they too had every intention of gaining the eight-hour day by industrial methods, as soon as possible. The only reason why they were not already taking action, they explained, was that the time was not yet ripe. Some had other difficulties to overcome

1. Cp. Morris and Bax: Socialism - Its Growth and Outcome, 271-2. "The demand (for the eight hour day) at any rate expresses the desire of the workmen to manage their own affairs, and to curtail the power of the capitalist class." On the other hand, de Roussiers argued (The Labour Question in Great Britain, passim, especially 250ff) that socialist ideas among the trade unions were generally a conservative force: for example that the strength of the eight hours movement among the craft unionists came from the fact that they saw the reduction of hours as a device to preserve their employment as skilled workers. His thesis was that their best policy could be nothing else than to meet the extension of mechanisation by abandoning their old craft specialisation and adapting themselves to new occupations.

before the project would suit their interests; but certainly none expressed the opinion that there was anything wrong in principle or immoral in the desire to work as short a time as possible. And this is despite the fact that the suggestion had extremist associations: it had been put forward in the International and again in "Kapital", and re-echoed by Hyndman in "England for All". (It was not always ^{however} a statutory eight hour day that was stipulated). Although it never seems to have aroused much interest, this fact was widely known at the time.

Thus, while the desire for the eight hours day represented a new level of ambition among the unionists, this was not confined to the "new" party, although perhaps they were a little more urgent in the matter. And this fact, of course, further supports our previous contention that there was less difference than has usually been supposed between "old" and "new" unionism. Moreover it would seem that the very limitation of the demand of the seventies to a nine-hour day had been determined largely by considerations of expediency. This is at least suggested by the fact that the workers who emigrated to the new settlements in New Zealand in the forties all agreed, quite separately in each settlement, that eight hours was to be their working day in the new colony. Surely in Britain too the unionists would have demanded eight hours

If they had thought there was a possibility of achieving this objective.

How was this further demand of the eighties justified? The old emphasis of the seventies on the social benefits of more leisure was made again, more especially for those who were still working for longer than the nine hours. Much more stress, however, was now placed upon the argument that the reduction would greatly help to relieve the unemployment that seemed the greatest problem of the day. Shorter hours would necessitate the employment of more workers: this was the point that attracted by far the most attention. A similar argument was that there was a glut in the labour market, and that after a short time reduced hours would result in higher wages. Quite failing to appreciate that it was the same superior bargaining strength that had obtained the one that had also gained the other, the "legal" party pointed to the tradesmen who worked only nine hours as being also the most highly paid.

Both of these analyses depended of course upon the workings of supply and demand within the economy. Shorter hours, it was argued, would diminish the supply of labour, and thus increase its price and the demand for workers. It was a similar consideration that actuated the miners as they sought limitation. Arguing that coal was in over-supply, they aimed

at reducing the amount produced in order to increase coal prices, believing that this would enable them to obtain higher wages and greater regularity of employment. (Arnot argues that this conflicted with their demand for a "living wage" which would determine prices rather than be determined by them, and that their vacillation from one ground to the other to gain a momentary advantage showed a serious lack of clarity in their doctrines of trade unionism.) (2) In fact the miners were surprised in the early stages of their campaign that they were unable to obtain the support of their employers, who they claimed would also benefit from a reduced output and higher prices.

The doctrinaire character of this sort of argument may well have alienated a certain amount of support, although probably not as much as was gained by the broadening of the issue. But in addition it did lead to certain difficulties - as for instance when other spokesmen contended that the shorter day would actually result in increased total production through higher productivity on the part of the individual worker. This of course would cancel out the reduction in the "over-supply". (3) (This contradiction does

2. R. Page Arnot: *The Miners*, 126-7, 129.

3. Within the space of nine months, Hardie contradicted himself on this point. In the *Miner* of January, 1887, he claimed: "... experience, extending over large districts and of long duration, has shown that the output of coal is as great in

not seem to have been noticed at the time). In one of his pamphlets on the subject Mann used the theory that more employment would cause increased demand for goods and thus better conditions for all parts of the economy. But this, an interesting case, is the only instance when this idea, which could well have aroused a host of opposing analyses, was put forward in these years. Certainly economic theory was so bandied about in the discussion that the relevance of the issue to the general principles of the advanced party may well have been obscured. At all events, as will be seen, there were many unions which supported the proposal while continuing to oppose the "new" wing on other questions.

Other difficulties were more practical. Most of the unions that opposed the resolution in the Congresses did so for some particular reason that made them fear its application to their occupation. For instance the Durham miners, who were actually employed only seven hours themselves, complained that it would upset the organisation of their industry, as the "boys" who also worked underground did so for nine to ten hours. Although they were castigated for their selfishness

3. (Contd.)

eight hours as it is in ten or eleven. This fact alone, which can be amply supported, ought to go a long way in removing the doubts of those who look with suspicion on the measure as being meant in some way to obtain the aid of Parliament in carrying out a policy of restriction." But in the same journal, in August of the same year, he wrote: "There are one million strong able-bodied men out of work today, for whom the passing of an Eight Hour Bill would find employment."

and, curiously, do not seem to have made a clear statement of their case in defence, they had good grounds for resistance. The boys were engaged in various tasks other than hewing which did not require as much time as the hewing itself: thus one ten-hour shift of boys was employed to two seven-hour shifts of the men. The only practicable way of reorganizing the working, as was actually adopted when a bill enforcing the eight hours day for mine-workers was carried early in the next century, was to employ two shifts of boys to three shifts of men. As in a large proportion of the crowded north country homes there would be several miners working in different shifts, this resulted in serious social evils. Having to prepare meals and clothes several times at repeated intervals in the course of each twenty-four hours, many miner's wives obtained very little sleep. And in addition the whole social life of the villages was badly disrupted. (4)

Similarly, there was the group of unionists, the cotton operatives of Lancashire the most prominent among them, who were fearful of adding cost to their products because of the fierce international competition in their particular industries. The dockers for their part kept to the background in the discussion: the rigidly restricted day would obviously

4. S. Webb: The Story of the Durham Miners, 64, 68-71, 82. Webb does state that although this was the original ground of objection, later the north-east miners defended their position by appealing to individualist principles.

complicate their problems. The blastfurnacement were also wary because of their difficulty -- that their existing shifts corresponded to the length of a "heat". And those unions, such as the Boot and Shoe Operatives, which were working for the extension of the factory system within their industries, had fears that the restriction would delay the elimination of the "out-worker", whose hours of course could not be regulated, and who might therefore receive more favour from the employers.

All these unions approved of the principle of legal enforcement of the eight hours day, but merely feared the practical effects of its application in their own industry.

This was in fact pointed out by the President of the 1888 TUC in his opening address:

"... all adherents of an Eight Hours Bill will admit that several of the skilled trades are very divided on the subject, this arising not so much from a dislike to legislative interference as from the difficulties they foresee in applying such a measure to their particular industry." (5)

Thus when the provision for "trade option" -- by which any trade could exclude itself from the operation of the law by taking a ballot of its members and obtaining a majority against the proposal -- was added, virtually all gave the resolution their support at the Congresses.

Even apart from these considerations, the measure

involved other practical difficulties which cost it some support. Was it right to co-erce an unwilling minority? As in many trades where the majority were favourable there were groups of workers or union branches which strongly opposed a reduction of hours, usually because of fear of its economic effects, this perennial problem of trade unionism raised itself in particularly dangerous form in any draft of an eight hours bill. "Local option" was suggested and rejected, on the ground that all districts competed with each other and that none could be given an unfair advantage; "trade option" was eventually adopted, despite objections that those members of a trade who desired the boon should not be deprived of it by the backwardness (or "selfishness" as it was more often put) of their fellow workers. As this would involve the difficulty of overcoming the lethargy of the mass of members of any union in persuading them to record a vote for the eight hours when the ballot of their trade took place, the "trade option" provision was amended in typical trade union fashion on Hardie's initiative to the form that the measure would apply to every trade except where a majority of members voted specifically for their own exclusion. (6)

But of course this solution did not give general satisfaction.

Still another difficulty was the question of overtime.

6. This incident will be considered again when the course of the movement in the TUCs is described.

What would be the point of introducing an eight hour day if overtime were to continue? Already the nominal working-hours in several trades bore little relation to the time actually worked. (7) As this problem was discussed very unintelligently, with little reference to prohibitive overtime rates of payment and much more to prohibiting overtime absolutely by law - which the opponents of the proposed bill very rightly pointed out was rather a fantastic suggestion - it was another prolific source of discredit to the whole proposal.

It is impossible, of course, to estimate with any accuracy the effect of these various objections and difficulties on the voting at the Congresses. Although they did not represent any hostility to the eight hours bill that arose from individualist principles, they must have cost the measure a good deal of support. It follows that the number of votes opposing the proposal in various years cannot be taken as an index of the strength of anti-collectivist feeling. On the other hand, one fact that emerges quite clearly, and will become more obvious when the course of the movement towards the advanced programme in the Congresses is examined directly, is that although a majority was soon won for the

-
7. This is despite the fact that the rules of most of the large craft unions expressly forbade the acceptance of overtime. The ASE frequently admonished its members on this point, but was quite unable to enforce this provision.

eight hours bill this did not mean that the majority of the unions favoured the other proposals of the advanced party. Despite the fact that the early stages of the contest between the advanced and the "old" parties were fought over the legal eight hours question, to a considerable extent the two movements were separate. (8) Even the "front-bench" view of the legal eight hours proposal as the dividing line between "self-reliance" and "paternalism" was merely a rationalisation of considerations of expediency: they were collectivists as much as the majority of the unionists. But if the majority disagreed with their judgment on this point, they took up their own stand on the same ground of practical tactics. Certainly it was not long before a large proportion of the delegates were prepared to give a vague assent to socialism as the ultimate objective! but on the issue that mattered -- the setting-up and financing of a completely independent Labour party -- the Congresses were not prepared to take any action until the whole situation had been transformed by a development in another quarter.

8. In addition to the fact that the members of many of the craft societies opposed their leaders on this question of the legal eight hours, there were several "old" leaders who supported the proposal. One was C. J. Drummond of the London Compositors, who was a leading advocate of the bill, yet on his retirement declared himself bitterly opposed to the advanced party. (The Workman's Times, March 26, 1892). Threlfall was another "legal eight hours" man.

One important factor in this difference in the voting figures on the different issues, although not by any means predominant in its effects, was the position taken up by the Miner's Federation of Great Britain. The Federation was desperately eager to obtain an eight hours Act for the miners, yet the miners and their leaders were the most ardent of Liberals, the least independent in their attitude to the Liberal Party, the least socialistically inclined of all unionists. (9) In fact they justified their demand for legislation on the old ground that theirs was a special case - that the fearful conditions under which miners worked and the obvious "over-supply" of coal exempted their industry from the general objection to legislative interference with hours of work - and disapproved of the eight hours bill as a general principle. They were not prepared to support the measure for other occupations: only the exigencies of their position in the Congress forced them to give reluctant support for the general measure in 1890 in the process of trading their block of votes to obtain support for their own interests. Yet without their unwilling adhesion, which their delegates had to justify in detail when they reported back to their Conference (which was severely critical of their action in

9. This, of course, is despite their traditional extensive use of legislation to improve mining conditions, which they always regarded as a special exception to the general principle.

supporting the general measure), the famous victory on the eight hours issue in 1890, acclaimed by the advanced party as a triumph for collectivist principles, would not have been won.

The position of the Miners' Federation in relation to the advanced movement will be considered in more detail in a separate section of this chapter; for the moment, the attempt will be made to throw more light on the forces operating in the Congresses by briefly sketching the development of the legal eight hours campaign.

After most of the strongest and best-known unions had obtained the nine hours day by industrial means in the mid-seventies, the onset of depression in 1878-9 led many of the employers to attempt to restore the ten hours. The attack was successfully resisted in most instances, the main exceptions being some cases in Scotland. There the position rested until trade began to revive again about 1886.

(Curiously, Jevons stated in 1882 in his "The State in Relation to Labour" that a widespread sentiment was in existence in favour of a legal restriction of hours in all industries, but there seems to be no trace of this in the union records of the time, except that a resolution in favour of an eight hours law as a device to decrease unemployment did appear at the 1883 TUC. It was confined, however, to

government employees and others working under conditions controlled by legislation - presumably the Factory Acts - and although carried by 33-8, it had been considered in the course of the "slaughter of the innocents" in the last hour of the Congress, received no discussion, and seems to have aroused little interest).⁽¹⁰⁾ Although Hyndman had re-echoed Marx's suggestion of an eight hours law in "England for All", this proposal did not become part of the explicit programme of the SDF until 1884, and then only for government employees. Since it was extended to include all workers only in 1886, it seems likely that it was Tom Mann's development of the idea that was the chief origin of this subsequent change in emphasis.

More than any other factor, it appears to have been propaganda carried out for the proposal by Mann that set the campaign in motion. His pamphlet, the first publication specifically on the subject of an eight hours day was issued in 1886, and in the next year or two he was active in arousing interest, particularly in ASE branches. Although he seems to have thought that the idea came into his head spontaneously, it probably had its origins in his socialist reading. In any case the field was ripe for the sowing. The proposal, a most suitable means of expression of the new movement of

10. 1883 TUC Report, 47.

aggressiveness that was beginning to stir, was seized upon by the early bodies whose appearance at this time is one of the portents of "new" unionism. Nor, despite the apparent influence of his campaign, was this altogether due to Mann's activities. The Knights of Labour who gained some strength in the Black Country in 1886 stressed the eight hours day: it had long been an ambition of the organised workers in the United States and the colonies, and had revived as one of the foremost projects in all of these countries at about this time. When the National Labour Federation was formed on Tyneside in 1886 the gaining of the eight hours day was its immediate, most specific purpose: however it appears that it was industrial action that was contemplated. When it was discovered that opinion was not yet ripe for a strike to be declared for the purpose, the Federation turned to other activities - mostly political action and the organisation of the unskilled. (11)

In 1887 a meeting of London trade unionists was called by some of the socialists to discuss the question, and one authority claims that it was at this meeting that it was decided to raise the issue at the Trades Union Congress of that year. (12) Certainly it was William Parnell, a

Prominent London socialist and a Cabinetmaker's delegate who

11. S. Webb and H. Cox: The Eight Hours Day, 22.

12. Ibid.

eventually moved at the Congress, in the form of an amendment to a resolution suggesting an attempt to obtain the eight hours by "increased combination, assisted by the Government", that an eight hours bill be obtained as the "best way of providing permanent work for the vast number at present out of employment". After a two-day debate, the amendment was rejected 76-29, but a further amendment by C. J. Drummond of the London Compositors that a "plebiscite" of all the unions be taken on the question was then adopted. (13)

In the intervening year before the following Congress the proposal was debated more widely, receiving particular prominence in H. H. Champion's "Labour Elector". Nevertheless, when the returns of the ballot were eventually placed before the Congress they proved quite inconclusive.

In circularising the unions the Parliamentary Committee had added to the ballot paper a number of "points for consideration" as follows, obviously meant to put the proposal in the most unfavourable light:

"Would you be willing to make the necessary sacrifice in your total week's wages which such an alteration would involve?"

"It is necessary for you to bear in mind that in case of an eight hours law being obtained all overtime would of necessity cease."

13. 1887 TUC Report, 34ff. In his opening address, the President, a local (Swansea) unionist, had declared: "Parliament must pass an Eight Hours Bill." (p. 20).

"In case of your being in favour of asking Government for such a law, it must not be forgotten that capital, which is much more powerful and better organised than labour, will have the same right to ask for the regulation by Parliament of the conditions under which you labour and are paid, as you have to invoke Parliament's assistance against capital.

"Is it your opinion, keeping in view the fact that on the continent of Europe the prevailing number of working hours per week is very much greater than in the competing trades in this country, that we are at this time justified in seeking the reduction suggested?"

Only a handful of unions had voted, and fewer than 30,000 unionists - a very small fraction of the total. (Curiously, although C. J. Drummond had sponsored the ballot, his union, the London Compositors, had declared themselves 1125-2098 against the suggestion of seeking an eight hours day, and 560-2566 against agitation for a bill). The officials of the larger unions had not even placed the question before their members. However, the "front bench" were not permitted to shelve the matter so easily. By a vote of 42-22 the Congress called for a fresh ballot to be taken without the addition of any comment to the instructions. (14)

Meanwhile a large demonstration was held in October in the Birmingham Town Hall by the Knights of Labour and local unionists; and the proposal was also debated at the

14. 1888 TUC Report, 44ff. Copies of the Parliamentary Committee's circulars are usually bound with library copies of the reports. In adding its "points for consideration" to the Eight Hours ballot paper, the Committee gravely stated: "We express no opinion in this circular upon the policy of these proposals, but leave you to form an unbiassed judgment and decision."

International Trades Union Congress held in London in November, when the English delegates were divided and the Continental unionists almost unanimously in favour. (15)

When the great movement of "new unionism" began in the following year, this brought an impetus to the "legal" cause. Although the Dockers' Strike was still in progress as the 1889 Congress met in September at Dundee, the address of the President whowas, as usual, a local unionist with no national reputation, already stated the "legal" argument from the viewpoint of the unskilled:

"Within two years our unions have almost entirely changed front upon this point, and the general body of the members are in advance of their leaders. Towards the decision now arrived at three important facts have contributed, namely, the success of the Ten Hours Factory Act; the comparative failure of the organised trades to maintain a nine hours system; and the hopelessness of the task of consolidating within reasonable time the enormous mass of disorganised labour. ... Repugnant as the mention of Parliamentary interference is to many of us, myself included, it seems to be the only feasible means by which the unspeakable misery attending industrial warfare, where the contingencies of war have not been provided for, can be avoided." (16)

When the figures for the second ballot were presented, however, they were found to be little more satisfactory than had been those of the previous year. In most cases only a small proportion of the members of the union had voted; the Lancashire textile operatives' officials had made no attempt

15. Webb and Cox, 25.

16. 1889 TUC Report, 15.

to discover the views of their members, but had merely recorded the full membership of their organisations as being opposed to any attempt to obtain an eight hours day, whether by industrial or legal means. Of the total of about a million members for all the unions represented at the Congress, the number participating in the ballot was only 178,000 (the great majority of the miners, with their 200,000, had not taken part); of these less than 110,000 were returned as either supporting or opposing the first proposal -- that an attempt be made to obtain the eight hours day. The figures were 39,656 in favour, 67,390 opposed, but of this latter total over 50,000 represented the textile unions which had not actually taken a vote. On the second proposition -- that an attempt be made to secure an eight hours bill -- the voting was 28,511 in favour, 12,283 against, the textiles vote not being included in this set of figures as the unions had been recorded as being opposed to a reduction of hours in any case. (On the other hand, the Ayrshire Miners -- Hardie's union -- had also been recorded as giving a unanimous 10,000 votes for the affirmative in both cases.) (17)

Thus the results were little more conclusive than had been the case the previous year. However, they do reveal some points of interest. Apart from the textile operatives,

all the unions taking part had returned a majority in favour of the eight hours. Moreover, although they were mostly unions of craftsmen, 11 of the 15 unions that had balloted on the question had recorded figures in favour of the "legal" method. In many cases only a fraction of the total membership had voted, but in quite a few the total of votes on the second proposition was smaller than on the first, indicating apparently that many were indifferent about the means adopted. For instance of the 5664 Ironfounders, the figures for the first question were 3608 for, 1380 against; on the second 1843 in favour, 1410 against. Of the 3214 Operative Bakers of Scotland, 1181 favoured the legal method, 90 were opposed; for the 3966 Associated Carpenters and Joiners the figures were 427 for, 119 against; for the 13,000 of the ASRS, 2190 for, 1504 against; for the 1900 Associated Blacksmiths 331 for, 162 against; for the 7590 of the Typographical Association 1269 for, 1141 against - compared with 1505-1191 on the first proposition. Even among the unions that had returned an unfavourable majority, the proportion of those favouring legal action was considerable: for instance the figures for the 5350 craftsmen of the Steam Engine Makers were 629-650.

At least one significant feature emerges: if the usual apathy of the great majority of the members be

disregarded - on the ground that it was always those who were active who determined policy - a large proportion of the members of the smaller unions, even when these were craft societies, were in favour of appealing to Parliament. As the delegates from this type of body formed a large part of the strength of the Trades Union Congresses, it was their attitude that frequently determined the Congress decisions, although it was usually representatives from the great unions that formed the Parliamentary Committee. To a large extent this seems to account for the difference between these decisions and the attitude of the "front bench": the latter were not altogether representative of the majority of the delegates, who were generally more advanced in their views. It also helps to explain the generally advanced tone of the Presidential Addresses, the Presidents being local men, and only very occasionally of "front bench" standing.

In addition to the smaller craft unions, it was soon found that a large proportion of the members of the ASE and Amalgamated Carpenters, which had not returned figures in the ballot were also moving over to the legalist side. Yet the time had not yet come. When, after this report of the voting had been presented to the 1889 Congress and hotly criticised, the debate on the proposal was taken, the result was defeat

by 63-88. (18) The miners had voted against the resolution, yet later in the proceedings their own request for an eight hours bill was given Congress support, the "old" unionists explaining that mining was "an exceptional case". (19) The debate on the general measure had enabled Hardie to make two points: he asserted that the proposal would not be a case of begging Parliament for grandmotherly protection but the issuing of an instruction - Parliament should be their servant; and he returned "old unionist" jibes as to the impracticability of socialism by retorting that it would be easier to enact the eight hour day than the Radical panacea of nationalisation of the land. (20)

Until 1889 the issue had been a simple blanket one to be either supported or opposed: proposals for various forms of option, stimulated largely by the Fabians who now turned their attention to the question and endeavoured to put the proposed bill into more practicable and acceptable form, were now beginning to be discussed and greatly helped to increase support. And support was also won in other quarters by means of demonstrations. The greatest of these was held in London on May 1, 1890, as part of an international display, similar functions taking place simultaneously on the Continent. At

- 18. Ibid., 57.
- 19. Ibid., 58.
- 20. Ibid., 57.

the head of the London committee was Aveling, probably the man least likely to inspire the confidence of the "old" unionists, but so great was the support the project received that very reluctantly the London Trades Council was forced to co-operate. It made the stipulation, however, that at the 7 platforms it controlled out of the total of 16 in Hyde Park no reference was to be made to a bill.

"Notwithstanding the original dissensions, the divided management, and the scarcely hidden hostility of the leading Trade Union officials," Webb and Cox testify, "the demonstration proved an unparalled success. ... (It was estimated that a quarter of a million attended) ... One result of this gigantic demonstration was the adoption, by the Metropolitan Radical Federation, after prolonged discussion, of an Eight Hour Bill on the lines of that drafted by the Fabian Society, as part of the programme of the London Radical Clubs."

A few months previously Randolph Churchill had also declared his intention to support the same bill, which included the "trade option" device. (21)

When the delegates gathered for the 1890 Trades Union Congress, for the first time they included a considerable number of representatives of the "new" unskilled unions, although not in sufficient force to make a very appreciable difference to the voting. Of the total of 457 delegates, fewer than 25 came from the "unskilled" unions; but there were also 24 from the Seamen and Firemen, and many of the 58 Trades Council men must have been eight hours supporters.

21. Webb and Cox, 32-33.

At the head of the opposing party were about 50 delegates from the Lancashire textile unions. On this occasion the Miners' Federation, who had once again, despite the specific instruction of the previous year, failed to obtain the support of the Parliamentary Committee for their bill, were determined to rectify the position by electing one of their own men to the Committee. Previously the nominee of the Northumberland and Durham miners had always obtained more votes than their candidate, and as only one representative of each trade was permitted, they had not been able to gain a seat. To make sure of success they had sent no fewer than 50 delegates; the Miners' National Union, representing the views of the Durham and Northumberland men, had sent 15. But in canvassing for the election this Federation delegates now discovered that they could win sufficient support only in return for undertaking to vote in favour of the general eight hours bill. Reluctantly they agreed to do this. When the vital division was eventually taken, still without mention of any provision for "trades option", the "legalists" were successful, but only by 181-173. And included in their total were apparently all the 38 votes of the Miners' Federation. (22) When, later in the Congress, the miners'

22. 1890 TUC Report, 49-54. In his "Speech on the 1890 Trades Union Congress" (published as a pamphlet), Burns claimed that of the 193 votes comprising the majority on

bill arose for discussion, it was quickly put aside on the ground that the industry was already covered in the general measure. It was thus that the Federation delegates had to explain and defend their action when they reported back to their own conference. (23)

When the Congress regathered in 1891 at Newcastle, all the parties were on their mettle because of the result the previous year. The proportions of the various groups of delegates were altered to a certain extent, however, because of the different location and because of the proposed institution of a system of card voting, which was nevertheless discarded in one of the opening sessions. Thus the Miners' Federation, which would have been entitled to 150 votes, sent only 38 representatives; and the Miners' National Union, which would have exercised 60, sent 40. There were 52 delegates from Trades Councils, and the number of representatives of the unskilled workers had risen from the approximate 25 of the previous year to about 55, largely because of a contingent of 20 from the Tyneside body, the National Amalgamated Union of Labour. In addition there were 16 delegates from the

22. (Contd.)

the final division, 184 represented 900,000 unionists, while the 155 who opposed and 106 who abstained represented 540,000: it seems difficult to believe that Burns could have known the part taken in the voting by every delegate. (The division mentioned in the text above, when the voting was 181-173, was taken when the proposal was in the form of an amendment: the 193-153 division was held when the amendment had become the resolution).

23. Ibid., 62; R. Page Arnot: The Miners, 146-7.

National Amalgamated Seamen and Firemen and a greatly increased number from small craft societies, making with the 70 representatives of the various Lancashire textile operatives' union a record total of 552. The only other large contingents, 38 from the Amalgamated Carpenters and Joiners and 13 from the National Boot and Shoe Operatives, were also by this time supporters of the proposal. On the whole, therefore, it appeared that the relative strength of the main elements of the two factions had not altered very considerably.

When the eight hours question was reached, however, it became evident that the victors of the previous year had decided to modify their demands in order to obtain better support. Thus Mathin first moved that the government be pressed to call a conference with other countries to establish the eight hours system internationally and thus overcome the difficulty of competition. Hardie, however, quickly sensed that this was rather remote, and obtained the addition of the 1890 resolution as a gesture of confirmation by 232-163. (24) The next step was a proposal to add a provision for "trade option", in such a form that no trade was to be subject to the eight hours bill until the unions in that trade had taken a ballot and a majority had

24. 1891 TUC Report, 41.

voted in favour of the proposal. In the debate on this clause Millett spoke in its support, arguing that it would lessen the great difficulty in getting the Act through Parliament. His speech thus showed that some at least of the "new" party were beginning to appreciate some of the practical objections to the measure -- it would in fact, as has been noted, raise particular difficulties for the dockers. (25)

After the clause had been added, Hardie again in his typical fashion rose to his feet and saved the day. Making a better emphasis and striking a finer balance in the compromise, he obtained its amendment to a provision, more closely in line with trade union practice, that all occupations were to be included under the law excepting those in which a majority of the unionists voted specifically for exemption. The completed resolution was then carried 341-73, and so the victory of the previous year was confirmed. (26)

One interesting point arises: only 414 delegates of the total of 552 had participated in this final vote, and on some of the amendments the number had been lower; why had a quarter of the delegates abstained? In the crucial vote on the "legal" principle the number of abstentions had actually been greater than the majority. Yet there had been no lack

25. *Ibid.*, 45.

26. *Ibid.*, 54.

of spirit in the debate -- indeed the speakers had at times become quite abusive; and the eight hours supporters had gone the length of holding several meetings before the opening of the Congress to organise their forces. Possibly the miners were among those who abstained: the miners' resolution was given a separate debate on this occasion and carried 290-50, despite bitter opposition from the National Union; but their candidate was easily defeated in the election for the Parliamentary Committee. (27) Apparently they had refused to trade their votes as in the previous year, when they had returned Fickard with 171 compared with 148 for John Wilson of the Durham Miners. In this case the "legal eight hours" party must have owed their success largely to the support of the smaller craft unions and Trades Council men.

At the following Congress in 1892 the debate took a similar course, a resolution incorporating the "trade option" device being again amended to provide that all occupations should be included except those in which the workers voted for exemption, and then carried. The only new development was that this "trade option" provision had won over the Lancashire textile operatives: although they considered that international trade conditions precluded its adoption in their

own industry, they now favoured the principle of the bill. (28)

In the succeeding years the resolution became one of the Congress "hardy annuals", carried almost automatically as if part of the ritual. Even the famous coup d'etat of 1895 when many of the "new" party were excluded made little difference to its support. One puzzling feature remains - a large proportion of the delegates continued to abstain from voting. Thus in 1893, when there were 495 delegates, the figures were 97-18, only a quarter participating. But in 1895, immediately after the "purge" had taken place, the resolution was carried 625,000-222,000, with only a few abstentions. (29)

Once the Taff Vale issue came to the forefront, the eight hours question seemed almost to disappear from view. After the Liberal victory in 1906 attempts were made to include eight hours provisions in factory, mining and shop Acts, but emphasis had passed to the Right to Work Bill in the field of general legislation. It was in 1919 that the workers in most industries won the eight hours day - by industrial action. (30)

28. 1892 TUC Report, 61.

29. 1893 Report, 56; 1895 Report, 43.

30. Cole: Short History of the British Working Class Movement, 307, 388-9.

(b). The "New" Movement and the Miners.

If, as has been seen, the campaign for an eight hours bill for miners conducted by the Miners' Federation had no real connection with the general "legal eight hours" movement, does it follow that the formation of the Federation did not contribute to the "new" movement in unionism? Certainly the example of its success may have been one of the stimuli, particularly because of its greater aggressiveness than the older Miners' National Union; but is it also true, as some writers have suggested, that its opposition to the sliding scales and demand for a "living wage" is an instance of the "new" trend of thought among the unions?

Logically, this proposed "living wage" which would govern coal prices -- in preference to a wage that would be governed by them -- is certainly a socialist conception. But unionists rarely bother themselves with details of logic. As has been shown, for instance, the miners' demand for an eight hour day was usually justified by their spokesmen from Liberal individualist principles as a device to restrict over-production in order to raise wages, and as a special exception to the precept of "non-interference" by the Legislature. But Arnot points out that as soon as the Federation succeeded in raising wages by ordinary trade union methods, it tended to place less stress on this

argument, and revert instead to the usual plea of the value of the social benefits to be gained from shorter hours.(1) And in fact the miners also managed to find another justification for restricting production - the depletion of the country's coal resources.(2) In short any argument - socialist, Liberal, geological, or merely social - that would support their cause was likely to be seized upon, as always has been the case with unionists. Certainly unionism itself is implicitly socialist to a degree, in the sense that unions show a natural tendency to resist the free play of competition up to a certain point. Thus there had always been a certain socialist tinge to a great deal of trade union thought, even in the amalgamated societies in the sixties and seventies. But there is no ground for inferring that the revulsion of the Federation from such an apparently individualist device as the sliding scale and its preference for such a socialist conception as the "living wage" signified any new tendency towards collectivism or greater independence of the Liberal Party. It is the trade union demand for higher wages that always has an implicitly socialist tendency, however it be rationalised.

As has already been pointed out, the sliding scale

-
1. R. Page Arnot: *The Miners*, 126-7 - discussed also in previous section.
 2. *Ibid.*, 97.

was not regarded with favour by the advocates of free enterprise, but was in fact condemned as late as 1886 for its interference with the free operation of competition. And when the workers adopted the device in the seventies it was because they saw it in this light: for all its defects, it seemed to mitigate the harshness of the open market and introduce an impersonal element into wage determination, and it did help to confine the future actions of the employers. It represented a bridge to a better method. It seems to have been this same intention, to make use of the scale as a make-shift, that the central district miners had in mind in the early eighties before the Federation was established when, badly defeated in sectional contests, many proposed a return to a sliding-scale system as the best safeguard they could salvage from the disasters they had just experienced. (3)

The main and self-sufficient reason for the revolt of the Federation from the sliding-scale system was the steady decline in the price of coal. The "living wage" conception was a rationalisation of their only possible alternative demand. Coal prices had been more than £1 a ton at the ports in 1873; by 1882 the F.O.B. price at Newcastle was 7s. 11d. (4) No other explanation is needed. If prices had

3. Ibid., 72-3.

4. Ibid., 67. The pithead price in 1882 was 5/8. The 1873 prices had, of course, been extraordinarily high.

continued to rise from their 1873 peak, it is probable that the unions in the central district would have continued under the scales for many years longer.

Nor, according to R. P. Arnot, was it because of differences over the scales that the Federation unions formed a separate organisation from the Durham and Northumberland miners. Its predecessor, the Amalgamated Association of Miners, which had obtained most of its membership from the central districts, died out in 1879 as the result of a series of fruitless struggles against reductions, leaving the unions weak and almost helpless. On the other hand, despite the reduction of their daily earnings from about 9s. to an average of about 4s.4d., the Durham and Northumberland unions in the north-east, the backbone of the rival Miners' National Union, remained well organised and strong. Probably this was because of the greater homogeneity of their mining villages, in which the miners formed the great part of the community, and the almost patriarchal relation in which they stood with their employers. At all events they managed to negotiate an improved scale about 1881. (5)

In the same year, a group of Lancashire unions struck, but coal poured in from the surrounding districts and long-

5. Ibid., 61.

term contracts were signed between the consumers and neighbouring collieries which lost the county a great part of its markets for many months. The result was thus a disastrous defeat, followed by great hardship. Later in the year, largely as the result of the work of Thomas Ashton, a Lancashire Federation was formed. Simultaneously Ben Pickard was reviving the Yorkshire body. Both organisations condemned the scales, and they now co-operated in calling a conference of central district miners which was well supported by the neighbouring county federations in Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire. Plans were carefully made to make a simultaneous approach to the employers in October, 1882; but as a period of improving trade resulted in their demands being conceded, the unions disbanded without forming a permanent federal organisation. (6)

There followed the second recession of trade, which resulted in the employers' attempting to take back the advances. A series of strikes took place in which the lesson of the need for co-operation was again thoroughly taught: as the central district collieries all had access to the same internal markets, it was disastrous for one county to strike while the others continued production. Although appeals were made to the Miners' National Union,

no encouragement was received. On the ground that the various districts with their differing interests would never be able to agree to a unified industrial policy, its executive refused to widen its objects beyond the field of political activity and would not co-operate in industrial action. Moreover the miners of the north-east, well organised and strong, were reluctant to be drawn into the disputes of the weak and more vulnerable central district bodies. They replied only with an invitation to the other unions to join the National Union and accept its constitution. To the suggestion that a closely centralised industrial organisation be set up, they retorted that a strong federation could only be constituted from strong member unions - ultimately, as the circumstances demanded, it was the close co-operation provided by the central body that enabled the county organisations to be built up. (7)

Meanwhile the Scottish miners were in the midst of one of their short-lived bursts of activity. From 2,000 in 1884 the strength of their unions had risen to 25,000 in 1886, the year in which the Scottish Miners' Federation was formed with Hardie as secretary. Although the Scottish unions were to remain unstable for many years, Hardie's Ayrshire Union declining from 10,000 in 1886 to 1,000 by 1890 and their Federation falling apart before that date,

7. Ibid., 63-70.

for the moment their militancy added support to the attitude of the central district unions. (8)

The difference in outlook between these districts and the unions of the north-east on the interlinked questions of industrial policy and the degree to which the national organisation should be centralised had been apparent for some time; but the issue was first thrashed out at a national conference held in October, 1887. It then became obvious that the central districts would have to make a definite breach with the Miners' National Union. Yet when it actually came and the Miners' Federation of Great Britain was formed by the central districts, the split was on the question of the eight hours bill, which had also been raised at this October, 1887, gathering. And it was on this issue that bitter enmity soon developed between the two parties. Certainly there was also a very real difference in industrial policy, but the main reason why Pickard appealed at the formation of the Miners' Federation for the support of "all miners now free from sliding scales" was merely the practical difficulty that only these were free to strike in support of a movement for an advance, since the scales bound those who worked under them not to

leave the mines. After examining this question in detail,

8. Ibid., 75.

Arnot reaches the conclusion that

"Finally, it was this (the Eight Hours Bill) more than any other question of militant or non-militant policy on wage questions that widened the breach with the miners of Northumberland and Durham. For although Northumberland and Durham differed in many respects from the Central Coal-fields there was no insuperable obstacle to their joining the Federation until the bitter strife that arose over the Eight Hours Bill." (9)

Nevertheless the Federation, which although not formally created until the end of 1889 was in practical operation from the autumn of 1888, combined its eight hours agitation with a militant industrial campaign on normal trade union lines, beginning from this earlier date. Plans were carefully co-ordinated, and by October a gain of ten per cent had been made throughout the central districts. Fortunately for the militant policy the movement coincided with a steady rise in the price of coal, the average pithead price increasing from 4s. 10d. in 1887 to 6s. 4d. in 1889. Thus the employers offered little resistance. Success consecrated the federation project: the miners poured into central district unions in tens of thousands, enabling

9. Ibid., 138. See note (4) of previous section. One suggested reason for the difference in outlook between the miners of the north-east and those of the central field has been mentioned previously - the fact that the former hewed for export, the latter for the home market. Another is given by de Roussiers, who stresses the fact that the former lived in villages wholly occupied with mining, where relations were often semi-patriarchal, while the latter were in a densely populated area where they could transfer from colliery to colliery without shifting from their houses. (The Labour Question in Great Britain, 139, 240).

further gains to be made with similar ease. As early as the following February a movement for a further ten per cent increase was suggested; and this was achieved by July. By the end of that year, 1889, still a further ten per cent had been demanded and won, completely a total increase of thirty per cent in the central coal-fields in a little more than twelve months. In 1890 the price of coal now rose further to 8s. 3d., and so a further ten per cent was asked for and obtained before the autumn. Meanwhile the membership of the Federation had risen from 96,000 in 1889 to 150,000 in 1890; the Yorkshire Miners' Association had increased from 8,000 in 1887 to 38,000 in 1889 and 50,000 in 1890; the Nottinghamshire Miners from 350 in 1886 to 7549 in 1889, 15,575 in 1891. (10)

One result of these successes was to bring into greater prominence the question of the Miners' Eight Hours Bill. Although this issue had already been raised at Westminster, R. B. Cunninghame-Graham having moved in the Commons the insertion of an eight hours clause in the 1887 mining bill, until 1889 it was Hardie alone among miners' leaders who had been very active in the matter. (Hardie of course was in close association with Cunninghame-Graham from 1887). Part of his attack on Broadhurst on his first appearance at the Trades Union Congresses had been an attempt to censure him for voting against Cunninghame-Graham's amendment. (11)

10. Ibid., 92-3, 97-103, 113-4.

11. 1887 TUC Report, 22.

Although W. Bailey of the Nottinghamshire Miners seconded a resolution at the following TUC calling for an eight hours bill for miners and railwaymen, to which Hardie proposed an amendment that all trades be included, both amendment and resolution were defeated, the latter by 46-25.(12)

Until this time, despite the fact that the decision at the national conference of October, 1887, had been in favour of an eight hours bill, the unions which were coming together into the Federation had taken little action, and had not yet completely decided whether to pursue the object by industrial or political methods. Now in March, 1889, it was decided to support Cunninghame-Graham's bill, but also to take industrial action. When it was found, however, that the non-unionists, who had supported the wage movements, were not firm on the eight hours issue, the proposed strike was not declared, and all energy was thrown into political activity. Despite the determined opposition of the north-east miners a resolution was obtained at the 1889 TUC, and for the next four or five years all questions of relations with other bodies were determined from their bearing on the eight hours measure. Even the Miners' International Congresses were supported almost entirely for the purpose of furthering this aim.(13)

12. 1888 TUC Report, 45.

13. Arnot, 134-8.

The fortunes of the miners' eight hours bill resolutions in the following TUCs have already been traced: as has been seen, they were passed annually despite the continued opposition of the north-east unions from 1889 onwards. Progress in Parliament proved very much slower. As long as he was in the Commons, Cunningshame-Graham endeavoured to bring his Bill before the House; but, receiving no support from the TUC Parliamentary Committee as long as Broadhurst and the Miners' National Union held sway, he was unsuccessful. In March, 1892, after Broadhurst had resigned from the secretaryship and the Committee had been forced to take some action, the Bill at last received a hearing in the Commons. But it was rejected 160-272 on the Second Reading. As a result, the issue was very prominent in the mining electorates at the general election of that year, Broadhurst for instance being apparently defeated by the hostile votes of the Nottinghamshire miners in his constituency. (14) Possibly for this reason, the Bill was debated again in 1893 and carried 280-201 on the Second Reading; however Gladstone, who perplexed the Federation by combining approval of the principle of the measure with reluctance to over-ride the opposition of the north-east unions, could offer only a Saturday for a Third Reading. The number of Members who would agree to attend

for that purpose proved insufficient. (15)

Although it had come so close to success and continued to keep up the pressure of agitation, the Federation was able to make no further progress with the measure for the rest of the century. It was eventually carried only in 1908 after the Liberal and Labour victory of 1906.

Putting aside for the moment the unwilling assistance it lent to the general "legal eight hours" movement and whatever accidental socialist emphasis was contained in its demand for a living wage, what was the relation of the Miners' Federation to the advanced movement within the world of trade unionism? The Federation was in fact one of the most determined forces in opposition to that movement. Hardie himself was never in the least representative of the Federation, and he received his bitterest attacks from among the miners' leaders. The ephemeral character of the Scottish miners' unions that had given him entry to the Federation only confirmed their impression that he was a politician rather than a trade unionist, and thus did not really belong with them. There was in fact always a Scottish Representative on the Executive, but for this office they preferred R. Chisholm Robertson, who until about 1891 at least seems to have been Liberal in his politics (16) and attacked Hardie very trenchantly at the

15. Ibid., 200, 267.

16. Ibid., 108.

1889 TUC.

At the 1890 TUC, Pickard was one of the most determined opponents of independent Labour representation. (17) And although the miners unseated Broadhurst at Nottingham in 1892 and voted elsewhere irrespective of party and solely according to the candidates' views on the Miners' Eight Hours Bill, this was the only respect in which they wandered from the path of Liberalism. In 1897 when the ILP ran Curran in a by-election at Barnsley, Yorkshire, in opposition to a Liberal who supported the Bill, Pickard spoke against him and the miners themselves went so far as to stone Curran and his supporters. (18) All the Federation M.P.s were staunch Liberal-Labour men. Further, as late as 1897, after the nationalisation resolution had been successful for several years at the Trades Union Congresses, the annual conference of the Federation rejected by no less than 134,000-21,000 a resolution from the revived Scottish Federation that it was

"absolutely necessary that the land, minerals, railways and instruments of wealth production should be owned and controlled by the state for the people."

And when it agreed instead by 97,000-6,000 on Radical lines, that it was necessary "for the maintenance of British industries to nationalise mines, railways and land" the Scots, according to Arnot, were not ill-satisfied. (19)

17. 1890 TUC Report, 38.

18. Arnot, 302.

19. Ibid., 301.

Likewise the Federation was the most stubborn opponent of proposals to raise a common fund for Labour representation, maintaining the quasi-Liberal attitude (as indeed, as will be seen, did many of the unions even after 1900), that representation was a matter for separate action by the different trades. Looking upon the Labour Representation Committee at first as a flash in the pan, it did not affiliate. In fact the miners, who in any case were notorious among the other unions for a tendency to keep to themselves⁽²⁰⁾, had long suspected all suggestions of combined political action as ruses on the part of the poorer societies to obtain money from the stronger unions for their own political purposes. And the Federation was now one of the strongest Labour organisations, and the most successful in obtaining seats in the Commons.

After the Taff Vale decision, however, it is probable that the Federation would have joined the Labour Representation Committee almost immediately, but for the fact that it had already instituted an elaborate political fund of its own, which paid much higher salaries to its Members than the LRC could afford, and was difficult to dismantle. Nevertheless some of the officials were still reluctant to leave the Liberals, and did their utmost to thwart the large section

20. The section of manuscript notes on the Trades Councils in the Webb Collection contains repeated complaints on this score.

within the Federation which wanted to co-operate with the new party. At all events it was not until 1909, as the last major trade union organisation to do so, that the Federation left the ranks of Liberalism and merged its political activities with the rest of the Labour movement. (21)

It is obvious, therefore, that any assistance given by the central district miners to the "legal" eight hours campaign, and thus to the advanced movement in trade unionism, was incidental and unintentional. In fact, despite its new aggressive spirit and the apparently socialist tendency of its demand for a living wage, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain was among the most conservative of the unions, and its leaders were the staunchest supporters of the Liberals, although, like all "old" unionists, hardly subservient to the Liberal Party. Moreover, although the advanced party in the Trade Union Congresses were closely associated with the legal eight hours movement and the proposal closely accorded with their doctrines, the passing of the eight hours resolutions did not mean that they had won the Congress over to their point of view. And this is still true even apart from the incidental stimulus given to the legal eight hours movement by the Miners' Federation.

21. *Ibid.*, 352-63.

CHAPTER 11.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE "NEW" UNIONS.

What place must be assigned to the "new unionism" in the origins of the revolt of British Labour from Liberalism? In Labour writings one continually encounters generalisations in terms like these -- that the "new unionism" "represented the new socialism in the industrial sphere". What does this mean? Does it state anything of real significance? The purpose of this chapter will be to show by an examination of the "new" unions of unskilled workers that such a phrase does in fact convey very little, and that any element of truth it possesses is scarcely important or useful. Although it is possible to find isolated and extreme utterances of various "new" unionists which suggest that the motivation of these bodies was an aggressive socialism, this analysis is far from being true of the "new" unions generally, in either their teaching^v or practice. Such utterances naturally attracted attention, but represent the exception rather than the rule. In fact the "new" unions were on the whole much less different from the "old" than has often been supposed. Not only were the craft unions much less lethargic and reactionary than they have traditionally been painted -- as preceding chapters have been meant to show -- but the "new" bodies for their part were

much less militant, much less revolutionary in tone, and much less concerned with political methods than seems conventionally thought. (How often does the progress of history seem to consist in first drawing clear distinctions and then softening them!)

In the first place, it is as difficult to generalise about the "new" unions as it is of the "old". In many respects there were considerable differences among them. What was "new unionism"? Did it consist chiefly of a type of organisation that excluded friendly benefits as a matter of principle, or of extreme militancy? (This latter characteristic was of course associated with rejection of the use of the benefit system, since it was held by some "new unionists" that fear of imperilling their benefit funds made the craft unionists over-cautious). And was this militancy the result of a conviction that the interests of employers and workers were incompatible? Or was the important element in "new unionism" a complete lack of exclusiveness, as opposed to the craft interests of the "old" unions, and based upon belief in the fraternity of all workers that would lead inevitably to political action? Did "new" unions regard industrial activity as only something of a make-shift, a function subordinate to efforts to further the coming of the socialist state? Did they in fact propagate socialism, specifically

or implicitly?

Each of the "new" unions would furnish different answers to these questions. Moreover most of these answers would be little different from those that would be obtained if the questions were asked concerning "old" unions. The differences between "old" unions and "new" were almost entirely of emphasis, hardly at all of principle, and not very marked in any case. It is safer in fact not to attempt generalisation at this stage, but first to examine one by one the organisations of unskilled or semi-skilled workers that were known as the "new" unions.

When and how did the movement of "new unionism" begin? (G. D. H. Cole's view that "new unionism" was beginning to appear in the seventies, only to be delayed by the "Great Depression", has already been noted). The movement as a whole is generally dated from the London Dock Strike of 1889, or from the beginning of that chain of events - the match-girls' strike of 1888 and the winning of the eight-hours day by the gasworkers - from which the dockers seem to have obtained direct inspiration. And this does seem a suitable choice, as it was undoubtedly the Dock Strike that caught the imagination of the country and aroused the unskilled workers in their thousands to flock into a host of "new" unions. But it is also significant that there are signs that the "new

unionist" movement was already on its course in several districts, quite independently of London developments, before this stimulus of August, 1889.

In 1886 for instance a National Labour Federation was formed at Newcastle-on-Tyne which had the organisation of the less-skilled workers as one of its main purposes. Initiated mainly by members of the A.S.E. at Armstrongs' Works, it spread rapidly throughout the north-east, reaching a peak about 1887 with thirty branches and 7,000 members. After this it fell away until reinvigorated by the Dock Strike, when it proceeded to extend still further afield. Its main function was to act as a "strike insurance" society, its sole benefit being a strike pay of 5/- a week, which attracted many unions to pay the weekly due of 1d. per member. But in addition it had the special object of securing the eight-hour day (apparently by industrial methods) and at first took some part in politics, discarding this activity about 1888 because of the dissension it caused. As Burt and Fenwick long remained its trustees, it could hardly, however, have been very "advanced" in its politics. There were many middle-class helpers, including a number of curates. As little information is available about this body in its early years, it is difficult to estimate its character at that period, but it does seem to have paid some attention to the unskilled. Probably the

advance of mechanisation in the north-east engineering shops, more marked than in the rest of the country, had some bearings on its interests.(1)

In the same district the Tyneside and National Labour Union was also formed in February, 1889 - some months before the London Dock Strike. It arose from a series of addresses by a William Stanley of Newcastle in the summer of the previous year, and one of its main objects was apparently to organise the platers' helpers against the exactions of the Tyneside boilermakers. As the London strike followed so closely afterwards, it is impossible to estimate what its growth might have been without that influence. Certainly this society, which changed its title in 1890 to National Amalgamated Union of Labour, quickly became one of the leading "new" unions and spread far afield. A business-like and fairly powerful body at this stage (as will be seen later), it was often in conflict with the National Labour Federation mentioned above. A third somewhat similar body on the north-east coast was the Knights of Labour, a number of branches of this idealistic American secret society, which placed great stress upon uniting all grades of labour and upon political action, being formed in this area about 1888, apparently without exercising much

1. Webb Collection, A XLII, 29. Tom Mann stated that he found the district quite asleep when he went there in 1887 as an SDF organiser (Ibid., A I, 398).

influence.⁽²⁾ In addition J. H. Wilson's National Amalgamated Union of Seamen and Firemen, to be discussed in detail later, also was formed in the north-east in 1887; but there had long been feeble, transitory seamen's societies on this part of the coast.

The Knights of Labour were also active in other parts of the country: Tom Mann claimed they had 12,000 members in the Birmingham area in October, 1888,⁽³⁾ and Sexton states that a Liverpool branch was established, apparently before 1885, as the result of a visit from an American member. The membership fee of this Liverpool branch was only 1½d. a week, and a large number of the Merseyside dockers became members. In 1885, however, when they ventured upon a strike, they were soundly defeated.⁽⁴⁾

Another of the forerunners of the main movement was the National Amalgamated Labour Union, established in 1888, which apparently originated among the Swansea dockers. In 1889 it spread all over South Wales, the first Cardiff branch being formed in June in resistance to an attempt to lower the wages of engineers' and boilermakers' labourers, and reaching a membership of 700 by September.⁽⁵⁾ A Coal Trimmers'

2. Ibid., A XLII, 58.

3. Mann: The Eight Hours Day, 3.

4. Sir James Sexton - Agitator (Autobiography), 79-80.

5. Webb Collection, A XLII, 45.

Association was also formed in Cardiff in May, 1888, but this was scarcely a "new" union in any accepted sense: the work was done by a form of co-operative piecework, and the average earnings were from 35 to 40 shillings a week. An agreement had existed with the employers since 1879, and it was alleged infringements of this agreement that were the cause of the formation of the Society. No strike took place, but a joint conciliation committee was formed with the employers to interpret the articles. (6)

In addition to Fillett's body, there was another great union of dockers which almost rivalled it in size in the early 1890's - the National Union of Dock Labourers, with headquarters in Liverpool. This body was also founded before the London strike, being first established in Glasgow by two ardent followers of Henry George, Richard Morhee and Edward McHugh, both from the north of Ireland. It was in early 1889 that they formed a branch in Liverpool, which soon became its main centre. Although this Union really became active in a seven weeks' strike that was partly concurrent with the great upheaval in London and in which it won only a few small concessions, thousands of dockers had already flocked into its ranks before this began. Sexton claimed, in fact,

6. Webb Collection, A XLII, 192-205. I have followed the dates given in this source, although they conflict to a certain extent with those in S. Amberry: The Labour Movement in Swansea.

that, fearful because of the London developments, the employers precipitated the dispute to crush the union before it gained strength. The characteristics of this National Union of Dockers will receive attention later. (7)

The first of the "new" unions to appear in the chain of events leading directly to the main movement of the unskilled was Will Thorne's Gasworkers' and General Labourers' Union. Even so the gas-stokers were almost semi-skilled, for it was by no means every man who could do their extremely heavy work, and their strong esprit de corps would hardly have been possible to a group of casual labourers. One probable indication that unionism was less difficult among the gasworkers is the fact that they had organised a society in the seventies, the famous body that had been crushed out of existence by legal persecution.

Speeding-up had reached the gasworks through the introduction of the "iron-man" - an automatic stoking device - and discontent was rising. The strongest grievance was the 12-hour shift, which had become almost intolerable under the new conditions, especially when it was sometimes extended without warning - so that the men could obtain no food - to eighteen hours. Yet Will Thorne and others first approached Burns and Mann in early 1889 to discuss the possibility of having their hours reduced by legislation, a suggestion which

received the answer, even from these two convinced Socialists, that by far the readiest course would be to form a union. Assistance was given by these two Socialists and Tillett; on Sunday, March 31, processions of workers - Thorne's contingent was led by a band for which he had paid from his own pocket - marched to waste land at Canning Town. Speeches were made by Thorne and Tillett, who were supported on the platform by Clem Edwards, a clerk only 19 years of age, who was to be prominent in the "new" unions for several years (later a lawyer and Liberal M.P.) Harry Hobart, a member of the London Society of Compositors, and Jack Walsh, another S.D.F. gasworker; and the union was launched with outstanding success. In the course of Thorne's speech, he had promised to obtain the eight-hour day within six months. At the end of the meeting, the organising committee had enrolled 800 members and were labouriously counting the bucketfuls of pennies with which the one shilling entrance fees had been paid. Contributions were fixed at 2d. per week.

Within a fortnight more than 3,000 had joined the unions. By July, four months later, no fewer than 64 branches had been established, 20 in the provinces and 40 in London, and membership was between 15,000 and 20,000 - a most remarkable growth. In June, the claim for the eight-hour shift was presented to the South Metropolitan Gas Company, and the walls

of Jericho fell. Early in August the other principal companies also gave way without a battle. (8)

The reason for the directors' capitulation was probably the solidarity of the men and the fact that they could not readily be replaced. Not only did their work require exceptional physique and some experience, but there was also a shortage of casual labour in the country at the time. But what is the explanation of this solidarity on the part of the gasworkers - this sudden determination not to tolerate their conditions? Socialist propaganda does appear to have struck some root among them, much more than in the case of the demoralised dockers, and may have been partly the cause. (Nevertheless the consistent Marxist tone of the Gasworkers' Union may well have been due entirely to Thorne and a handful of his associates among the leaders). But the emphasis of those who took part is placed on the example of the famous match-girls' strike - so much so that one can hardly doubt that this event was an important inspiration. (One difficulty regarding this suggestion is that this incident had taken place some considerable time previously, in 1888). And this is despite the fact that there was really no moral applicable to the stokers that could be drawn from it, for from first to

last the match-girls' contest had been an accident.

8. Souvenir History of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, 1889-1929, 3-6; W. Thorne: My Life's Battles, 66-73.

It had originated as a by-product of Annie Besant's socialist activities. As editor of the Link, a journal she and Herbert Burrows had founded for propaganda purposes, Mrs. Besant had published some striking revelations of the shocking conditions under which these girls were employed. Their wages were in fact the merest pittance. In response, the management of the firm had tried to obtain a denial from some of the girls of the facts she had publicised; but the girls had stood firm and had been locked out. Naively confident that she would not desert them, they had then turned to the astonished Mrs. Besant for leadership. The result had been a flood of publicity and a flow of donations. The firm had then quickly backed down. Although the episode had been provocative to other workers and had taught them something of the possibilities of a new technique, it was hardly genuine unionism, for all the decent, courageous honesty of the girls.⁽⁹⁾ The gasworkers meant to stand on their own feet in a permanent organisation.

Thorne was a socialist from the beginning, made no bones about his socialism, and was to remain prominent in the S.D.F. for many years, standing as an S.D.F. candidate in the 1905 election, though with the full support of the Labour Party. Although far from neglecting its industrial activities, the Gasworkers' Union was an out-and-out socialist organisation, carrying on a constant propaganda for the whole "socialisation

9. A. Besant: Autobiography, 334ff.

of the means of production, distribution and exchange."

For instance the Union sent a letter of fraternal greetings to the Miners' International Congress of 1890 in terms redolent of Marxism:

"To our Brothers, the miners of all nations, to our fellow workers who whilst speaking in tongues different from ours, are one with us in belonging to the oppressed and exploited class; are one with us in the great class struggle of labour against the capitalist; and one with us in the determination that that struggle shall have but one end - the emancipation of the working-class - to you, our Brothers, 'Courage, Unity, Hope!'" (10)

The Preamble to the rules of the Union, written by Eleanor Marx-Aveling, concluded on the same note:

"..... victory or defeat of any portion of the army of Labour is a gain or loss to the whole of that army which, by its organisation and union, is marching steadily and irresistably forward to its ultimate goal - the emancipation of the working-class... That emancipation can only be brought about by the strenuous and united efforts of the Working Class itself.

WORKERS UNITE!" (11)

Nevertheless the motto of the Union was, curiously, "Defence, not Defiance", and although this was a common union slogan, more attractive, one suspects, for its alliteration than its meaning, Thorne did continually insist upon caution in industrial policy. As early as 1890 the Union took an active part in an attempt to set up a Conciliation and Arbitration Board in London (12). In his 1892 Report Thorne advised that, "whenever possible without loss of dignity and

11. This preamble was retained by the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, the successors of the Gasworkers' Union, until 1942.

12. Annual Report 1891, 9.

self-respect", all disputes should be settled in the most quiet and expedient manner, especially in time of depression (13); in 1893 he counselled: "Strikes, through whatever causes, should be avoided whenever possible" (14); and again in 1894 branches were urged not to strike "unless oppressed to such an extent that their position is unbearable." (15)

In one passage at least Thorne did suggest that political activity was more valuable than industrial activity:

"the power of organisation is fast overshadowing that of capital, and in the near future it will be further minimised, when the workers wring from their grasps the machinery of political and municipal government, and use it for the protection of those concessions which they have gained through the respective organisations and in my opinion, it would be much wiser to spend a few pounds in the accomplishing of this result than to spend thousands of pounds in strikes." (16)

Claiming, too, that unemployment was the greatest scourge of the workers, he asserted that unionism could never overcome this -

"therefore, in my humble opinion, we must look to the Legislative Assembly for the remedy." (17)

In fact, he argued, even the legal eight-hour day would not solve this problem: it would be necessary to make an end of the whole profit system. (18)

Nevertheless, as the references

to "my opinion" indicate, these were side issues: the main

13. Annual Report, 1892, 3.

14. Ibid., 1893, 4.

15. Ibid., 1895, 3-5.

16. Ibid., 1892, 3.

17. Ibid., 1894, 4.

18. Ibid., 1895, 5.

function of the union, and the main stress of the reports, was undoubtedly industrial. In his memoirs, Thorne gave as the reason for the Union's great expansion the fact that it gave the workers not merely

"vague, indefinite appeals to revolution.... (but) ... something tangible, a definite, clearly lighted road out of their misery, a trade union that would improve wages and conditions, that would protect them from the petty tyranny of employers." (19)

Thorne's bluff geniality, in fact, always seemed a little out of place amidst the narrowness of the SDF: good relations with the ILP came naturally to him. At the preliminary meeting at the 1892 TUC which led to the formation of the ILP he approved of the project, but, as a SDF member, felt obliged not to take part. (20) Although certainly a socialist of the Marxist brand, he belonged much more than the SDF to the movement of the trade unions towards independent political representation.

As the Gasworkers had been inspired to some extent by the match-girls, so, in its turn, the Dockers' Union, partly at least, was the product of the Gasworkers' example. The dockers were, and long remained, very poor material for unionism, so much so that the reply of many of the "old" unionists to Ben Tillett's requests for help as he laboured some years before 1889 to establish a dockers' union - that

19. Thorne: My Life's Battles, 76.
20. Ibid., 184-5.

the task was impossible - was very little less than the truth. (Many did give him considerable help: he mentions Howell, Edger, Ben Cooper and W.C. Steadman - some turned to opposition later when they saw the "new" unionism as it actually developed. John Burns was one who at first sneered at the project).(21) Fighting like wild animals as they did in the cages at the dock gates for a chance of work, brow-beaten into spending some of their scanty earnings in the "right" public-house or on drink for the overseer, the dockers had lost almost all self-respect. They were nearly incapable of combination. Although there had been unions of dockers in the seventies, dock work at that time, carried out with a host of improvised devices, had been a partially skilled occupation, giving full scope for initiative and experience. The specialised docker had been in demand. But speeding-up had come to the docks too, as to everywhere else, bringing mechanisation with it, so that the work had reverted to an unskilled occupation, conducted at a break-neck pace.(22) While it was still dangerous to have an inexperienced worker in a gang, the casual could now become reasonably competent in a few days. The docker worked like

21. Tillet: Memories and Reflections, 106-8, 114, 115; Broadhurst Correspondence, item 58.

22. Sexton, 67-9; H. L. Smith and V. Nash; The Dockers' Strike, 14, 20.

an animal, and was little more than animal in all his social relations.

A second change too had taken place in dock work, more especially in London, but also at the other ports. Although there was little increase in the total tonnage of shipping, the number of workers returning their occupation as "docker" increased by half between 1881 and 1891.(23) The "speeding-up" and faster turn-around of shipping may have made some of this expansion necessary; on the other hand, one would expect the mechanisation to have reduced the number of men needed, to some extent at least. At all events, the figures seem to bear out the claim of the dockers that many thousands of new men, particularly those cast out by the disappearance of many skilled trades, flocked down to the wharves and docks, which in London became "a vast outdoor relief" centre for the unemployed.(24)

Although all casual workers in theory, dockers were generally graded in practice into permanents, semi-permanents and pure casuals. Nevertheless even the higher grades, who looked contemptuously upon the newcomers, seem to have felt the pressure of the swelling of the labour supply. If it be true, as Sydney Holland, one of the Dock Directors,

23. 1891 Census, General Report, 42.

24. Smith and Nash, 26.

(and later Viscount Knutsford), claimed, (25) that the employers tried to spread the work over as many men as possible in order to give a more even measure of relief, then the permanents certainly did have cause to resent the intruders, and of course the policy was open to some criticism. In any case most of the dockers seem to have been in a completely brutalised condition, hopeless of improving their position in any way. From the depths of his experience Tillett himself testified:

"There never will be a revolt with hungry men; possibly, hungry women will some day... We garnered a few members at each place, only to overstay our welcome; but we struck new ground... We had wool strikes; we got extra time for meals, extra money for the work, but the men drifted out of organisation from the moment they received advantage. Surely humanity - the humanity of the docks - was ingrate." (26)

Tillett's work had brought nothing but discouragement. His tiny Tea Operatives' Union had gathered a few hundred men occasionally, only to disintegrate again to a mere handful. Just before the strike, when illness brought on by a previous futile strike at Tilbury had reduced the amount of organising work he could do and resulted in a critical decline in the Union, he appealed to Broadhurst in despair:

"... our union has not the strength necessary to maintain itself... Send us men to speak or funds to maintain ourselves, or we shall fall, crushed by our burden of want and woe..." (27)

25. Viscount Knutsford: In Black and White, 108.

26. Tillett: Brief History of the Dockers' Union, 11.

27. Broadhurst Correspondence, 58.

Similarly the years of propoganda of the SDF speakers, who morning after morning had come to the wharves to pay special attention to the dockers, appeared to have made not the slightest impression. When the great strike at last eventuated, it was stated again and again that the dockers accepted their socialist leaders despite their socialism, of which they still disapproved. (28)

Nor in its immediate origins did the strike appear to arise out of Tillet's prolonged labours. It began in a dispute arising from the haphazard "plus" system - a method of wage payment by which a price was calculated for each piece of work to be done based on the time the task would normally require, the men being allotted a bonus above their hourly earnings, determined by some method that was a mystery to them, if they completed the work in less than the computed time. Crude and vicious in its operation, this system was bound to provoke trouble. On August 12 the discontent of a group of men who thought themselves defrauded over some "plus" boiled over without Tillet's knowledge; hurrying to the scene, he persuaded them only with great difficulty to give the management a chance of redress before leaving their work. No reply, of course, was returned to the message he sent.

28. In fact there is almost too much protestation on this point, but the evidence seems to confirm it; e.g. Tillet: Brief History, 14.

The strike began on the following morning and, spurred on by the example of the gas-stokers, the thousands of workers along the river let loose their resentment, flocking from the docks in support. (29)

Although it was to end in a compromise, the strike was eventually to be claimed as a victory for the dockers, and to all intents it was, for the long fight they had maintained and the fact that they had gained even some of their points constituted a revolution. It was this success that established the union and began the whole great surge of "new" unionism, unnumbered thousands of other unskilled dockers' workers following the / example in all parts of the country. Did it therefore prove that the "old" unionists were wrong, and that combination of the unskilled could be a success?

The most remarkable feature of the strike was the dockers' extraordinarily good fortune. Although their strategic position was hopelessly weak, in every moment of

29. Tillett: *op. cit.*, 17; and *Memories and Reflections*, 119; Smith and Nash, 32-3; P. de Roussiers: *The Labour Question in Great Britain*, 356, gives full details of the "plus" dispute. F. H. Rose: *The Coming Force* (an inaccurate book), 55, has a curious story of the strike's immediate origin, allegedly told him by John Burns. According to this account, Mann had also been trying to form a dockers' union, and it was out of jealousy of him that the Tea Operatives had called the strike. Mann had then called on Burns and suggested that they offer their services to Tillett.

crisis, just as it appeared that they had reached the end of their resources, the fates turned in their favour.

In the first place, they were extremely fortunate in the time at which the contest took place. It was one of the very rare occasions when there was a shortage of casual labour: but for this fact they could have held out for only a few days or hours. "All but the professional docker," Smith and Nash testify, "were being drawn off the market by the rising demand for labour in their respective trades." (30) Secondly, they were extremely well favoured in their leadership. Rarely in Labour history could a group of men arise from the working class with the combined talents of Burns, Mann and Tillett at such a crucial moment. Mann's organisation, improvised of necessity on a gigantic scale, could hardly have been bettered: for instance the distribution of 440,000 one-shilling food tickets in such circumstances required exceptional administrative ability. Nor, except perhaps for his intransigence in the final negotiations, could Tillett's strategy and his ability to maintain the strikers at the necessary level of enthusiasm; while Burns's handling of the processions, the note of good-humoured, martial encouragement with which he kept up

the good spirits of the men, his flair for publicity, his preservation of good relations with the police, all amounted to genius. "When he was absent ill for a single day," says G. D. H. Cole, "everything began to go wrong". (31) Moreover these three were greatly helped by the group of stevedores "who formed the backbone of the committee and of the strike itself" (32); the dockers themselves could never have formed a committee that could have handled the work. And the stage was perfectly set: the middle-class conscience was at its most tender point of sensitivity; Booth's revelations and the enquiries of the sweating Commission had prepared public interest; the whole event had novelty and drama about it that made the press seize eagerly upon the "hand-outs" skilfully prepared by Champion. It could never have happened a second time; never again could public interest have been so thoroughly roused and such generous support obtained. As Smith and Nash wrote a month or two later:

"... many comfortable persons who have sealed the Dockers' Strike with their approval, inasmuch as it was a success... are beginning to shake their heads over the 'contagion' of the movement." (33)

As the strike began to spread, the first crisis came with the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Stevedores' Union. Without their support the strikers might as well have

31. G. D. H. Cole: John Burns, 18.

32. Smith and Nash, 89.

33. Ibid., 6.

returned to work immediately; the rank and file of the stevedores favoured the dockers, but there was a large section of the Committee, consisting mainly of foremen, that was strongly opposed to any sympathetic action. (34)

Although the persuasion of Tom McCarthy won them over, he was only just successful. Now came the weeks of the first processions, and again good fortune: the London weather was extraordinarily good for the season, otherwise the demonstrations, with all their profound effect in making the men feel they were a body, in giving them something inspiring to do, in arousing the interest and sympathy of the City as it has rarely been roused, would have been virtually impossible. A further unusual factor that helped them win City support was the attitude of the shipping companies, who were nursing grievances against the dock management, and took the opportunity to repay some scores. Many of the newspapers which supported the men's case were in the control of shipping interests. (35) And at the head of the joint Committee of dock directors stood Sir Charles Norwood, a narrow, unimaginative man who, by Sydney Holland's testimony, put the owners' case in its worst light. (36)

Yet for all these unpredictable advantages that were

so invaluable to the dockers, their cause came within an ace

34. Tillet; Brief History, 19; Smith and Nash, 89;

de Roussiers, 356.

35. Smith and Nash, 68, 129.

36. Knutsford, 109.

of foundering. Despite all the unexampled flow of donations and the fact that the strikers were receiving only the bare minimum of sustenance, the funds had come to an end by August 29. A notice was posted that no relief could be paid for that day, and defeat appeared almost certain. As a last desperate throw, the Strike Committee now drafted an appeal to the London workers for a general strike, and after midnight, when he was half asleep from his exertions, completed it by obtaining Tillet's signature. He would never have given it if he had been capable of thought. It would have been the one false step that would have turned the tide of public opinion against them. There was no real chance that it would produce a worth-while response; but they had come to their wits' end in any case. All their previous good fortune seemed about to avail them for naught. Then, almost literally at the eleventh hour, word came that money was on its way from Australia, the foolish manifesto was withdrawn, and the contest continued. (37)

This unexpected gift from Australia was the most fortunate stroke of all, and could never for a moment have been taken into account. Not only was the money desperately needed of itself, but it lifted the dockers' morale to new heights just as it was approaching breaking-point. And in

proportion as it inspired the men, it broke the backs of the directors. Of the total amount of £49,000 that was gathered for the strikers, no less than £30,000 came from Australia and New Zealand. Beside this figure, all the remarkable movement of sympathy in Britain appears quite paltry: the total collection at one of the greatest demonstrations came to £6. 2. 1. (Of the remaining £19,000, £14,000 came from the British public, £4,500 from the British trade unions).*(38) All the Australian colonies subscribed, and the Post Office even transmitted the money free of charge.*(39) This phenomenon of the Australasian contribution will never be quite satisfactorily explained. Perhaps the best explanation lies in the memory nursed by a prosperous, equalitarian colonial people (still a strong folk-memory today in the same Dominions) of the miseries of the industrial cities they had left behind. Certainly there is no truth in the suggestion(40) that the colonials believed they were subscribing to some form of charity: full accounts of the course of the strike took up the most prominent space in their daily press which then, as now, centred all its interest on British news.

38. Ibid., 59.

39. Ibid., 120-3.

40. For example, G. Brooks: *Industry and Property*, 7. See also Smith and Nash, 123.

There followed only Cardinal Manning's mediation and the final compromise. And, at the risk of seeming to overstress the point, it can also be argued that even in this conclusion the strikers had fortune mostly on their side. Although Manning's plea to the directors, based as it was on charitableness, appeared to them quite irrelevant and may have been ill-judged in tone (41) -- apart from Norwood, they seem to have been not unreasonable in their attitude -- few other men could have served as well to confirm and heighten public feeling against the directors as the outcome of the incident. Moreover it is difficult to suggest another man who could have won the strikers over to accept the compromise as he ultimately did, and refusal would probably have prolonged the struggle to a much less favourable ending. For at the last the men's uncompromising attitude was beginning to be questioned, and opinion was beginning to waver from their support. (42)

The success of the Great Dock Strike of 1889, which set in train so many other developments in the history of the British Labour movement, was due, therefore, to most exceptional good fortune. It was far from demonstrating that unskilled workers were capable of protecting their own interests. Of course it was the opposite impression that

41. Knutsford, 110.

42. Smith and Nash, 142ff.

was current and influential at the time, but as will be seen, this was not to endure for very long. Certainly many of the new societies of unskilled workers that appeared soon afterwards managed at first to win appreciable gains from their employers. Most of these concessions, however, were obtained without opposition - employers too had been impressed by the success of the dockers; it was a time of prosperity and rising prices, when wages would have risen in any case; and these unions too were favoured by the temporary shortage of casual labour. It is probable, of course, that the gasworkers' success would have served as the stimulus to the whole "new unionist" movement even without the Dock Strike; and the apparent beginnings of an unskilled movement in the seventies and the first stirrings of revival as early as the mid-eighties tend to confirm this view. There are also the social and economic factors to be considered.

But one of the most important characteristics of the "new unionist" movement of 1889 was that several of the "new" unions became permanent institutions. As the "old" unionists gloomily insisted on remembering, there had been several upsurges of unionism among unskilled workers before, only to die away without trace at the first recession of trade. Despite the fact that their forebodings were to prove only

too true of hundreds of the new bodies of this time, several were to survive to become a permanent part of the Labour movement. As, with the exception of the Seamen's and Firemen's Union, it was the great unions that endured, despite extremely severe losses in membership, it seems that their sheer weight of membership carried them through the 1892-5 depression as if by momentum. To the extent that the spectacular nature of the Dockers' 1889 victory contributed to the great size of the larger "new" unions, that event, accident though it was in some respects, had far-reaching effects in helping to give them permanence.⁽⁴³⁾ If the gasworkers' example had been the sole stimulus, the "new" unions might not have established themselves permanently until many years later. The share of the 1889 Strike in stimulating the independent Labour political movement, however, is quite another matter.

Attention has already been drawn to the apparently negligible influence of the socialists in the formation of the Dockers' Union: the impression that the Union's inspiration was not socialist seems to be confirmed by its early history. Unlike Thorne and his associates, the Dockers' leaders do not appear to have pressed socialism upon their

43. Smith and Nash (161) believed that only such a spectacular strike could have established the Dockers' Union. See also 166.

followers, or not at least in any clear form. Although there are frequent references in the Dockers' Record, their monthly journal, to the banishing of poverty as the ultimate goal, to the need to exalt the social conscience of the community, and so on, there is not a single specific mention for some years of national ownership of the means of production or much reference at all to political aims and methods. I can certainly find no instance of the use of the term "socialism". The points that are made would hardly be out of place in an "old" unionist journal.

In fact the general tone is fairly set by an article in the first issue of April, 1890:

"In short, if we Trade Unionists will steer clear of Parliament, with its thousand baneful influences, and pay honest and sole attention to our many duties as organised workmen and as citizens, we shall press forward labour questions far more rapidly than by placing a value upon the gilded chamber of St. Stephens, which never does a good thing except by outside compulsion, and whose pernicious influence has (sic) emasculated a dozen or more honest workmen, rendering them well nigh impotent. The only time for us to consider Parliament is when it comes to us, and come it will as soon as we have done our work of organisation and education..." (44)

In the next issue, a statement by Mann from an article in the Nineteenth Century is quoted:

"... if (Parliament) had ability and inclination, it could never have the time to attend to the multifarious demands that are certain to crop up as labour questions press for solution."

Throughout the early numbers of the journal, in fact, these or similar points were continually repeated. In the October issue one writer was "strongly opposed" to sending union leaders to Parliament as "the energies of every good man who is sent there are wasted"; and on another page it was stated that

"Jack's (Burns) friends and neighbours in Battersea are anxious to send him to Parliament, but as he has publicly stated that he would sooner go to prison, we may hope that they will not be too hard on him, but will leave him free to do the work that is urgently required throughout the country."

However, this does not mean that the Dockers' leaders altogether despised the advantages that would be gained from a legislature dominated by Labour members. In the most explicit treatment of the point, an address by Tillett entitled "The Help Yourself Gospel" (45) he condemned Parliament as "the most unwieldy and stupid piece of machinery that we were ever cursed with ... what has it ever done? What will it ever do?" and argued that it was useless to them so long as it was "heated and fired by the greed of landowners and capitalists, and the few good men who battle stoutly for us are overwhelmed." "I have had enough of Parliament," he stated. But he looked forward to the time when Labour would control it, and continued ... "you and I must never cease until we remedy it" ... How was this to be done? ...

"Many people are going about the country telling us what we ought to do, but they don't tell us how to do it. I believe trades unionism will do it, and that is why I advocate trades unionism... I believe then, that our trades unionism, in the first place, is the most effective weapon we can place in our hands, and which if we don't make use of we are fools."

Although the thought is far from clear (and it is also hidden in the full length of the address beneath a mass of irrelevance), the emphasis seems to be upon education of the workers through the extension of unionism:

"... Until then (the time when Labour controls Parliament) you and I have to organise. I believe a political machine and our trades unionisms are a good help. In many parts of the country the vote of the Trades Council decided the election. There is a power there... by their means we may get paid members of Parliament to represent us. Never until we get paid members of Parliament shall we ever have Labour represented as it should be. Never until you avail yourselves of your opportunities, never until you realise this fact shall we be respected - power alone is respected. And not until the workman's power shall mould his country's laws shall he enjoy the blessings to which he is entitled."

The stress may be rather different, but there is little here that is not typical of "old unionist" thought. Moreover it is Labour representation that is stated as the aim, and not socialism - in fact the address is much more redolent of "old unionism" than of socialism. And it seems to go further in its emphasis upon the value of Parliament than the usual statement of the Union's attitude. One interesting feature of this last passage is the stress upon power: "power alone is respected" is a common theme in Tillet's speeches. The

very phrase also occurs in the preface to the Union's first rules: "Combination is power, and power alone is respected and recognised."

For various reasons -- one was probably the fact that it was much easier to gain a seat on a local authority than to win entry into Parliament -- the Union placed much more stress upon obtaining representation on local bodies. Thus in November, 1890, the Record remarked:

"We are glad to learn that already vigorous action has been taken in several towns by our members to get direct representation on the Town Councils." (46)

And in the same issue McCarthy was reported to have said at a meeting: "They did not intend to trouble so much about Parliament, it was municipalities they wanted." (47) The authority of the local bodies touched the lives of the unskilled workers at many points. The Union pressed for them to be given powers to establish workshops for the unemployed; and one issue of the Record actually contained a detailed article on Louis Blanc's National Workshops, pointing out that his project had never been given a fair trial and arguing very earnestly that it had never been discredited. (48) Local bodies were also recognised as being of primary importance since they controlled the police and

46. The Dockers' Record, Nov, 1890, 3.

47. Ibid., 6.

48. Ibid., Feb., 1891, 11.

the power to call in the use of military forces against strikers. And in some cases they were the owners of the docks. One of their most important contacts with the unskilled was of course their control of public works; and their functions in the spheres of housing, and public health and sanitation, vital to the lower-paid workers, provided a further argument that was frequently mentioned.

Apart from the proposed municipal workshops, the closest approach to socialism in the early numbers of the Dockers' journal is possibly the demand: "If we must have fluctuations, let the community in its collective capacity bear the burden." (49) There still remains the fact that, while not specifically socialist, much of the thought of the Union contains socialist implications. But is this not almost equally true of "old unionism"?

In the early days of the Union, Mann and others tried to educate the dockers by means of Sunday morning lectures on economic subjects. Surely these must have carried the speakers well into socialism. Practically no reports of these lectures, of course, survive; but in one of them Mann certainly stressed the point the Fabians had made that the workers received less than half the national income. (50)

On the other hand, on another occasion he appeared to decry

49. Ibid., 6.

50. Mann: Memoirs, 108.

political methods:

"Labour had little or nothing to hope from Parliament or Parliamentarians. It had gained its great victories without either. Labour must depend upon itself for its emancipation, must combine and strengthen its unions, if it wished to retain the advantages it had gained and wished to secure more." (51)

Earlier in the same year, 1890, he had told the dockers that they must "carry their trade unionist principles" onto all local bodies whenever possible: they should "obtain pledges for fair contracts and eight hours... from any candidate seeking votes." The emphasis is again on the immediate, but he went on to add that they must always keep before them "the grand ideal of the Co-operative Organisation of Industry, when poverty, crime and consequent misery shall be banished from the land." (52)

To summarize, although there was a certain amount of contradiction in the Dockers' thought in these first years, and although they did place rather more stress on eventual control of Parliament than the "old" unionists, their primary emphasis was upon industrial methods. In reply to an attack made on "new unionism" by Shipton in an article in Murray's Magazine in June, 1890, Mann and Tillet specifically asserted:

"The statement that the 'new' trade unionists look to governments and legislation is bunkum... The methods adopted by us of determining a change in our present industrial system are on a strictly trade union basis. All our public utterances, all our talks to our members, have been directed towards cultivating a sturdy spirit

51. People's Press, Sept. 6, 4.

52. Labour Elector, Feb. 1, 1890, 77.

of independence... In fact we have been at pains to discredit appeals to the legislature, contending that the political machine will fall into our hands as a matter of course, so soon as the educational work has been done in our labour organisations. We are convinced that not until Parliament is an integral part of the workers, representing and responsible to industrial toilers, shall we be able to effect any reform by its means." (53)

They did aim at changing the "present industrial system"; but so did all but a very few of the "old" unionists. Their "educational" work implied the eventual formation of an independent Labour party; but as yet they were not even specifically advocating this. And since 1885 at least the craft unionists had also been moving towards this course.

When one turns to study the development of the ideas of the Dockers' leaders over a period of time, a further fact emerges: this generally more pronounced stress upon industrial as compared with political methods was more typical of the first few years of the Union's existence, when the first flush of the great victory still lingered and induced a false confidence. As the difficulties of the industrial situation became apparent, and the strength of the Union began to decline, the emphasis seems to turn correspondingly to political action. Even so, this shifting of the stress is little if at all faster than the same process as it was occurring among most of the "old" unions. And there was still

no clear sign of socialist doctrine. Although Mann's presidential address in 1891 stated that "the object of all genuine reform is to Democratise the Industry of the country", he was merely urging the delegates to support co-operative stores. He next exhorted them to be active in municipal politics, and then added, as if this were of secondary importance:

"Politically also we should exercise the power of the vote to press forward labour matters through Parliament, not as 'legalists' only, as opposed to voluntary effort institutions, but widely using Parliament to supplement and clench the good work done by the Trade Unions, Co-operative and Friendly Societies."

Their motive was to be "raising the toiler to the dignity his labour earns; and seeing that no man suffers want who contributes to the welfare of the nation by the labour of his hands." (54)

Tillett's report for the following year stresses the width of trade union issues, and urges the members to study economics, while Mann's presidential address becomes a little more specific, quoting Mill's statement that the problem of the time was

"... how to unite the greatest individual liberty of action with a common ownership of the raw material of the globe and an equal participation of all in the benefits of combined labour." (55)

His general stress is still upon the injustice of the hardships, particularly unemployment, inflicted by the development of

54. Conference Report, 1891, 16-7.

55. Ibid., 1892, 5, 82-3.

industry. In 1894 Tillett's tone becomes more bitter, but little more specific - "The Gains of Capitalism have long ago repudiated any notion of a common brotherhood of man." (56) In 1895, for the first time, he advocates Parliamentary representation, but, like any "old" unionist, he points to the example of the miners, and thus seems to have in mind a trade rather than a working-class interest. (57)

After the 1897 defeat of the Engineers, this advocacy quickly becomes more pointed and more insistent, but, as will be seen, this was also the case with the "old" unions themselves. In fact it was improved organisation in the industrial field - in the form of the proposed General Federation of Trade Unions - that was Tillett's first thought, as again was also the case with the other union leaders, political action the second. And even so his object in the political field was to obtain specific trade union legislation - "to demand therefrom (from Parliament) reductions of working hours, extension of Factory Acts to Docks, etc., an effective manning scale and adequate accommodation for sailors, give proper attention to the unemployed problem, etc., etc."

There is no mention of socialism, and nothing in fact that would seem at all unusual if found instead in an "old union" statement. (58)

-
56. Ibid., 1894, 6.
 57. Ibid., 1895, 12.
 58. Ibid., 1898, 5-6.

Socialism, of course, is usually and rightly held to imply hostility to capitalism and capitalists. Conversely, their alleged support of the device of industrial arbitration has often been instanced to illustrate the "subservience" of the "old" unionists to the capitalist system. It is thus with all the greater surprise that one discovers that as early as June, 1890, the Dockers' Union was endeavouring to form an Arbitration Committee with the employers. (59) And in September Tillett strongly advocated a board of conciliation

as

"the only means to bridge the gulf between capital and labour... (and to assist) the strengthening of the bonds of good feeling and robustness, which must inevitably tend to the moral, social and industrial advancement of the individual and the nation alike." (60)

Moreover the leaders of the Union showed pronounced consideration for what seemed the employers' interests in constantly exhorting their men in 1890 to do a good day's work. Several large meetings were held, apparently with some success, specifically for this purpose. (It was sheer irresponsibility of the part of some of the men that forced them to take this course). References to conciliation and arbitration are very common in the Union's records, beginning with one of the objects of the Tea Operatives - to set up "Conciliation and Arbitration Courts" - and growing stronger

59. Dockers' Record, June, 1890, 4.

60. Ibid., Sept., 1890, 4.

after Millett's return from his tour of Australia and New Zealand, where he had seen state-controlled systems of this type in operation. (61) At times he uses the term "Wages Court", which suggests a state tribunal which would determine wage rates on grounds of justice, fixing a "fair wage". In this form (the same as had been suggested earlier by Hardie), the proposal was certainly socialist, but it seems improbable that the unionists realised or cared that the two suggestions - private or state boards - were directly opposite in their implications.

In addition to its stress on conciliation and arbitration, there is another respect in which the Dockers' Union did not conform to the generally accepted pattern of "new unionism". Far from working for the brotherhood of man, the dockers were most exclusive. Refusing to accept the principle of "one man, one ticket", they caused bad-feeling in almost every district they entered, particularly with the gasworkers, who had adopted this phrase as one of their main slogans. One of their chief objects, if not to completely decasualise dock labour - they often stated this as their aim, but later experience has raised some doubt about whether they did actually desire this, was to exclude as completely as possible the general unemployed. The docks were not to be an

61. E.G. Annual Conference Reports, 1890, 146f; 1891, 18f; 1900, 5f; 1901, 10-11.

"agency for outdoor relief." In his first annual report Fillett declared: "Our Union is established not for the purpose of looking after the entire body of waifs, strays and unfortunates..." (62) And at the first conference, when the amount of the entrance fee was being discussed, and the suggestion was made that it be 10/6, the London branches wanted even a larger sum than this in order to keep out the East End "scum". (63) As early as August, 1890, it was decided not to include any more trades in the Union, which included several by this time, on the ground that: "Our special work lies at the ports and such other places as directly affect them." "Such other places" included the farms, the Union's ardent campaign to assist the farm labourers to better their conditions being frankly intended to keep them from swelling the casual labour of the cities. (64)

The Union's interest in municipal workshops doubtless had a similar source, although the dockers would also probably look to these for their own relief in slack times: the Union was active in obtaining relief for many of its members from Guardians in the worst months of the winter of 1889-90. (65)

Certainly one result of the dockers' 1889 victory and the greater regularity of employment for members of the Union that

62. Annual Conference Report, 1890, 146.

63. *Ibid.*, 21-22.

64. Dockers' Record, Aug., 1890, 8.

65. Annual Conference Report, 1890, 8.

followed was a marked intensification of the hardships of the East End poor, due to their exclusion from the wharves. (66)

The so-called "snobbery" of the "old unionist" craftsmen towards the unskilled workers has often been stressed in writings on labour history; but this was quite matched by the caste divisions even within the ranks of the labourers -- in other words, it was not a class distinction so much as a caste system within classes. And as such it loses much of its significance. All who knew the London dockers about 1889 stressed the importance of these divisions: the permanents or "royals" looked down on the "ticket" men, the "ticket" men or the purely casuals, while even the "professional" casual docker despised the outcast from some other occupation. "How long have you been at the docks?" was their sneering retort in any argument. The Millwall corn men thought themselves the aristocrats of the Thames. (67) Similar grades were recognised among the coal heavers and there was the same system of cliques at Liverpool:

"The hand busheller of grain -- now displaced by the elevator -- looked with scorn upon the man who did the donkey work on the quay; the grain carrier who could easily sling a four-bushel sack weighing a couple of hundredweights across his back and shoulders, and run along a swinging plank, thought himself the master workman of the ages; the sticher of the bags used in the bulk salt trade, a veritable artist in his craft,

66. Smith and Nash, 164.

67. Ibid., 25.

had a most colossal contempt for the man who merely handled bags filled at the salt factory, whilst the tallymen who weighed and checked the bags, considered himself the best and most important of all the 'casual dock labourers'." (68)

Apparently, in this respect at least, there was little of the spirit of "brotherhood of labour" among even the despised dockers.

This raises a further question: if dock-work was such a poorly paid occupation and was conducted under such evil conditions, why did dockers apparently make little attempt to find other work? Most of them, of course, could do little else, and its irregularity would itself attract many, but part at least of the answer seems to be found in the astonishing strength of the dockers' belief that dock-work was their prescriptive right: it was "their" work -- in some way or another it "belonged" to them. Sexton writes:

"It was a standing joke amongst we older hands that we had to compete with ex-Cabinet Ministers, jockeys and owners and trainers who had been 'warned off', broken-down company promoters, unsuccessful tradesmen and out-of-work counter-jumpers -- to say nothing of gaol-birds and the scourgings of the doss-house -- who swarmed the docks and strove to snatch the bread out of our mouths." (69)

This attitude -- that there was something unjust in others being permitted to enter dock-work -- is very frequently found among the dockers, and of course would help to account for their attempts from 1890 onwards to exclude outsiders.

68. Sexton, 111.

69. Ibid., 69.

Possibly of more significance in this connection is the fact that Millett, who seems to have had the opportunity and certainly possessed great ability, preferred not to leave the dockers and similarly that Sexton, even when black-listed and forced out of dock-work, kept up his close interest in the wharves although conducting a successful one-man business. The Dockers' Record, too, contained a good deal of information on ships and shipping that appears to show a sincere professional interest in their industry on the part of the men. There seems to be more to this attitude than a mere tactical attempt to increase bargaining power by limiting members, and doubtless it provided some at least of the motivating force for the "new" unionism.

One further point has to be made in discussing the Dockers' Union: the fact that, for all the improvement unionism seems to have brought about in the character of a great many dockers - observers seem agreed that many became much better men and citizens - the majority remained very poor material for unionism. The rapid decline in membership at the first adversity seems to illustrate this; and there are many complaints in the Dockers' Record of members who lost interest as soon as an immediate objective was gained and of other forms of short-sightedness and irresponsibility. The minutes of the first conference of the Union are a most discreditable record of puerile quarrelling over trivialities. The frequent exhortations in the Record and Union reports for

better discipline were far from completely successful: there was a very large number of unauthorised strikes, many of them very foolish. In later years, Tillet was to reflect: "Our war masters say it is easier to conquer a country than to govern it. We found that out." (70)

The Hull branch, which refused to listen to Tillet or Mann when they attempted to persuade it to be more reasonable, some of its members physically assaulting Tillet on one occasion, was even described by its own secretary as the "most brutal, selfish and unreasonable set of beings on the earth (who) would ruin the port completely if they were allowed to have their way." (71)

Other branches had to be sent lawyers' letters before they would forward their dues to the head office, and there were numerous defalcations. In almost every port the Dockers entered there was bitter strife with other unions: they were quite ruthless in attempting to crush societies that had been formed in the docks previously, even the unions of specialist coal trimmers. (72) In short, the early history of the Dockers' Union is not a very creditable story: this was not the material from which a strong independent political movement could have been made.

70. Tillet: Brief History, 32. Head office sanction was required for the declaration of a strike. At the 1891 Conference it was moved that authority to sanction strikes costing less than £100 be given to District Committees, but the motion was withdrawn. (Report, p. 33).

71. Webb Collection, A XLII, 16.

72. See Webb Collection, A IV, 9, 85; XLII, 9, 13, 14, 15, 17, 203.

Another of the "new" unions, J. Havelock Wilson's National Amalgamated Union of Seamen and Firemen, was of a different type again from either the Gasworkers' or the Dockers'. Although, since the seamen were one of the lowest of the despised grades of labour and its contests with the shipowners were among the hardest and most desperate of labour conflicts, this body must undoubtedly be included among the "new" unions, Wilson himself was always a liberal, with a profound distaste for socialism, and could always see the employers' point of view. The Seamen's society was a "new" union despite its leader.

The record of the Union is largely one of Wilson's perseverance amidst incompetence and complete irresponsibility. Born in 1857, he was the product of a mixed background, a blending of the roughness of the sea and the respectability of the shop-keeper. Although his paternal grandfather had been a ship's captain, his father, who died in Wilson's early infancy, had been a foreman draper and his mother, who strongly disapproved of his boyhood interest in shipping, kept first a general store, later a hotel and restaurant. His childhood was a hard struggle, but he was never hungry. Although he sold newspapers at six, he was sent to school later! eventually he was apprenticed to a lithographic printer and engraver, but finally ran away to sea. He was soon attracted by the idea

of a trade union for the degraded men about him. (73)

There had been quite a number of seamen's unions before this time; but they had all been local societies, and had mostly been very ephemeral. One of these had been founded in Sunderland in 1878. Joining this body, Wilson found it typically inefficient and limited in vision. Its members were all middle-aged, few of them seamen themselves, timid and befuddled in their ideas and afraid to shoulder any responsibility. Typically, one of the institutions of these old unions was the life-boat watch maintained whenever the weather was supposed to be threatening and for which the members of the watch were paid ten shillings a night: the watch was set at the slightest pretext and the money spent in drink long before the dawn. (74)

One great difficulty at this time was that the Mercantile Marine Boards which administered the Shipping Acts were dominated by the shipowners, the provision which had brought this about being a concession to the shipping interest which had been found necessary in order to obtain the passage of the Acts. (75)

Wilson determined to see that the machinery of the Acts was reformed. Throwing himself into the work very vigorously, he gathered a large number of

73. J. H. Wilson: My Stormy Voyage through Life, 1-14.

74. Ibid., 64-5, 67-9, 94-5.

75. Ibid., 75-7.

recruits and formed several new branches of the union. Meanwhile he made a close study of the thousands of shipping regulations. To the consternation of the rest of the union executive, who could think of not a single remedy to suggest, he even obtained an invitation for a deputation to the Board of Trade. But when the deputation eventually came to Whitehall, they disgraced themselves completely, turning the presentation of their case into a heated argument among themselves. (76)

In the meantime, as a delegate to the Sunderland Trades Council, Wilson formed close friendships with the "old unionist" leaders Burt, John Wilson and Crawford of the north-east miners, and Wilkie of the Shipwrights. Their advice was of great assistance to him as he took his next step. After attempting vainly for some years to persuade the officials of his society that organization on a national scale was necessary and possible, he laboriously -- taking twelve months over the task -- drew up the constitution for such a union of "amalgamated" lines, and decided to establish it himself. At the first meeting he called, in 1857, only one man attended -- thus the National Amalgamated Seamen's and Firemen's Union began with two members. At the second meeting, a week later, there were twelve; and at the third, the following week,

200. (77)

By the end of the first year, the Union had made considerable progress and was showing much more promise than had ever been the case with any of the older seamen's bodies. At the end of 1888 there were more than 45 branches, including a large number along the Bristol Channel, although the strongest section was in the north-east, where the idea of a seamen's union was less novel. (78) Even so the Union was still very weak, and by no means all of these branches were self-supporting. The difficulties of organising such a shifting body of men as the seamen were almost insuperable. As Wilson was now the owner of a restaurant with a hall attached and did not accept payment for his work as secretary and organiser, despite the fact that it engaged most of his time, it was favoured with unusually light expenses; otherwise it could hardly have continued to exist. In addition Wilson shrewdly carried on a newspaper publicity campaign, having reporters call each day for the latest information on the Union's plans and views, that attracted for that body much more than its due share of attention. (79) But although recruits were continually being won and new branches opened, the Union became a real force only in the wake of the 1889

77. Wilson, 96, 108-9.

78. Ibid., 159.

79. Ibid., 110.

Dock Strike. Its numbers rose to more than 60,000 in 1889.

At first sight it seems astonishing that such a large organisation could collapse as rapidly as it did in the early nineties. Nevertheless the conduct of its members during its brief existence was so incredibly short-sighted that one wonders on closer acquaintance how it endured as long as it did. Wilson estimates that a quarter of his men were good unionists, the rest being extremely foolish, reckless and irresponsible. For instance, one of his main objects in founding the Union had been to set up a chain of boarding-houses to free seamen from their greatest scourge - the "crimp" boarding-house keepers who plied them with bad liquor, robbed them of their accrued pay, and delivered them back, often insensible, to ships' masters before they had had more than a few days in port. Forced on by the clamour of the men, Wilson set up the first of these Union boarding-houses in Cardiff in 1890. There was an immediate outcry for others in the rest of the main ports. Meanwhile the members who had entered the Cardiff establishment settled down apparently for an indefinite rest and refused to pay any charges for board, on the ground that this would be incompatible with the principles of unionism! Soon the house was costing the Union between three and four hundred pounds weekly. Wilson then hurried to Cardiff and ejected sixty of the residents, but no

sooner had he gone from the port than they held a meeting and voted themselves readmission. In addition they circulated a lurid tale of Wilson's "dictatorial" and "unfair" treatment to fellow seamen, doing great damage to the Union's reputation among the workers he was trying to serve. (80)

A similar difficulty arose over funerals. Branches decided that members should be buried with due ceremony, several considering it necessary to equip a whole band in marine uniform for the purpose. In some cases funeral expenses rose as high as £200 for each occasion; and one branch reached an average expenditure on funerals of £50 to £60 a week. (The widow herself received a benefit of only £5). As the funds were decentralised, many branches quickly became bankrupt from this cause and applied to the General Executive for monetary aid. Similarly the branches threw themselves with great enthusiasm into the craze for banners: at one time the Union had almost 70 costing from £25 to £90 each. Although they were supposed to be paid for from special banner funds, these usually collapsed, and the bulk of the expense was generally borne by the Union. And of course the men who carried the banners in processions, being unionists, had to be paid for their services.

And this was by no means the end of the Union's financial difficulties. Its journal, "The Seafarer", the main function of which was publishing the autobiographies of prominent members of the society, was heavily subsidised, the first payment, which Wilson claims was "only a start", being for £1500. In addition, members in port looked upon the local secretary as the proper source for a loan as soon as their own funds became exhausted, which of course was usually in very short time after their arrival. (81)

One of Wilson's greatest difficulties was to obtain suitable men for branch secretaries, the Union being under the peculiar handicap, because of the continued absences of its members at sea, of requiring a permanent paid secretary for each branch. He had any number of applicants, mostly from ne'er-do-wells in search of an easy living, and confesses that in very many cases the officials were quite unsuitable, some of them costing the Union many thousands of pounds. (82)

This admission is borne out by the impressions of the semen's secretaries recorded in the manuscript notes of the Webb Collection: for instance F. W. Galton (the Webbs' research assistant) first met one of them accidentally when that worthy endeavoured to sell him some smuggled cigars in the vicinity of the docks; and in another case he notes:

81. Wilson, 175-8.

82. Ibid., 133.

"The local Secretary is as usual a thoroughly drunken and disreputable character." (83)

The constant comings and goings of the members also contributed to another of Wilson's difficulties - the reckless tendency to strike. Branches would vote in favour of a strike with the majority secure in the knowledge that by the time the contest was begun they would be well away at sea, with everything to gain, nothing to lose. Practically all of the Union's many strikes were called by the branches. Although he himself favoured reason and caution, Wilson had to give his help whenever possible, and was a most dogged fighter once the trial of strength had commenced. The difficulty was that there were often grounds for discontent. Although the decision to strike was generally a tactical error, Wilson usually seems to have been reluctant to quell a strike for fear of giving an impression that justification was lacking. (84) And he was often compelled to take action to hold his turbulent following together. Moreover he himself, despite his moderate views when in sober mind, had a natural tendency to rashness and impulsiveness which frequently had the better of him: for instance he once hurled himself from the platform at a political meeting with the intention of fighting the

83. Webb Collection, A IV, 82.

84. Wilson, 241; see also 173.

whole audience! Often, however, the Union's strikes were completely unjustifiable. For instance there was one occasion, which Wilson claims was similar to many others, when a captain who had specifically asked for and enrolled a union crew found six absentees from a complement of 22 when the sailing time arrived. Although no more union members were immediately available, the rest of the crew refused to allow him to make up his number from non-unionists, even despite his offer to pay their union fees.(85)

The gap between Wilson's outlook and the attitude of the bulk of his members naturally gave rise to a good deal of misunderstanding, much of which has lingered in tradition to the present day. Wilson is still spoken of among seamen as "a masters' man"; it is still rumoured that he himself was a shareholder in shipping companies and that he made a large amount of money out of the Union. Wilson was of course far from being a "masters' man". In his autobiography he specifically denies the charge that he ever had a share in shipowning(86)! and the evidence all tends to show that he lost much more money to the Union than he ever received from it. The misunderstanding arose naturally enough, and one of its sources has already been revealed - the resentment of members when he curtailed their irresponsibility. Another

85. *Ibid.*, 160.

86. *Ibid.*, 85, 201.

was the fact that, while the members were undoubtedly "new unionist" in temper and outlook, Wilson himself (despite his tendency to rashness, which was a further cause of misapprehensions) was essentially an "old" unionist. In addition to his association with the "old" leaders on the north-east coast, he had the close support of Broadhurst and Howell, and also of Lord Brassey, who attended the Union's first annual conference. (87)

His closest colleague in his work was Flimsoll, who was strongly opposed to "new" unionism. Two other prominent helpers were Edward McHugh and Richard McChee, the pair of Henry George's followers who were also very largely responsible for the formation of the National Dockers' Union at Liverpool - both strongly opposed to socialism. (88) Nevertheless Wilson was able to work in close co-operation with Mann and Tillett, the Seamen and the Deckers acting together in many strikes.

There were several respects, moreover, in which the National Amalgamated Seamen and Firemen under Wilson's leadership did not follow the generally accepted pattern of the "new" unionism. Its aims included the setting up of a full system of friendly benefits, including a shipwreck benefit. They also included the object, apparently not appreciated by many of the membership,

87. Wilson, 164-5.

88. Ibid., 137.

"to provide a better class of men for the Merchant Service, and to see that all members that are engaged through the union be on board at the appointed time and in a sober condition ready for work":

Wilson alleges that there was much ground for the masters' complaint of the poor quality of British seamen of that time. (89) He wanted foreigners to be included in the Union; there were about 40,000 on British ships at the time, and one of the problems was to end the undercutting of rates of pay by foreign seamen - eventually branches had to be established at several foreign ports. After bitter discussion, this was agreed to, all with four years' service on British ships being eventually admitted on equal terms, and prohibitive entrance fees being established for others: £15 for those with less than a year's service, £5 for those with three to four years. Thus there was a certain amount of exclusive spirit, and the question was considered as being merely one of tactics. (90) When a demand arose from several groups of unskilled labourers that general labour unions be formed under his leadership, Wilson opposed the suggestion. "I did not understand the dockers' affairs," he explains. Another reason was that he felt this would have involved too much work for one leader. (91)

Many of Wilson's statements seem to bear the stamp of "old unionism". For example:

89. Ibid., 126-7.

90. Ibid., 194.

91. Ibid., 139.

"The good Trade Unionist... does not like to take advantage of his employer, just as he does not like his employer to take advantage of him..."

and "I could not believe that there was any difference of opinion between seamen and their employers".(92) It was always the least valuable union members, he asserted, who were the most militant.(93) Looking back on the 1890's, he later wrote:

"I have now had time to reflect and weigh up the ideas of the older men with those of the younger men of the day. I am more convinced than ever that the older men had the more correct views."(94)

The suggestion in this last quotation that Wilson moved over further towards the "old unionist" position with the passage of time is reflected in other parts of his autobiography. For instance:

"A few extravagant and vigorous speeches from myself and others would send down the price of shares with a band. I did not realise then as I do now what this really meant to industry."(95)

But it also implies that he always tended towards the "old" viewpoint, and from the contemporary evidence it would seem that this was in fact the case. At the Trades Union Congresses he is found supporting first one side, then the other. Those of the rank and file who were to call him a traitor to the cause had never really followed the course of

92. Wilson, 134.

93. Ibid., 238.

94. Ibid., 151.

95. Ibid., 201; see also 212, 272.

his actions, which was reasonably consistent. The fact that for several years in the nineties he was at the top of the poll in the elections for the Parliamentary Committee seems to show that he had the confidence of many from both parties.

Wilson was never a socialist. "I want every man to be a capitalist," he writes.

"... if given a fair chance the workman has a better opportunity under our present system than they would have (sic) under any system of State control." (96)

And, concerning the 1892 election: "I was fully in agreement with the views of Mr. (John) Morley." But for the persuasion of Plimsoll, he states, he would never have entered politics. (97) The fact that he was a Liberal and not a Socialist did not mean, however, that he tended in any way to be submissive to the employers, or that he did not favour extensive "interference" with the merchant shipping service through legislation. The bulk of his parliamentary work was in support of Plimsoll's strenuous contest with the shipping interest for closer and better regulation of seamen's conditions. And when he stood as a Liberal-Labour candidate for Middlesbrough in 1892 it was against the determined opposition of the local Liberal Association and the Trades and Labour Council.

At first he instructed some thousands of his supporters to join the Association - a manoeuvre which ended in the

96. Ibid., 187-8.

97. Ibid., 264.

Association refusing to admit any further members. Although his following were strong enough to render the meeting abortive when the attempt was made to adopt the "official" Liberal candidate, they were unable to force Wilson's adoption, so that he fought the campaign against both Liberal and Conservative opponents. The support of Michael Davitt gave him the powerful Irish vote and he won with 4691 votes, to 4062 for the Liberal and 3333 for the Conservative. When at Davitt's request he now went to Newcastle to aid Morley, he greatly incensed the Middlesbrough Independent Labour Party, but he had not owed his victory to them in any case. "I had won Middlesbrough as a Liberal-Labour candidate," he retorted, "and had always proclaimed myself as such, in spite of the fact that I lacked the blessing of the local caucus." (98)

Although he wore a top hat to the Commons as a badge of his Liberalism, his first action was to move the adjournment against "my own party" on the question of the undermanning of shipping. As he won the support of half the House, Gladstone was obliged to promise him a Committee. The Union paid him a salary of £3.10s. "when I got it"; but he was often unable to afford the House of Commons 1s. 2d. meal. (99) From the outset, therefore, he was a typical Lib-Lab.

98. Wilson, 246-50, 255-64.

99. Ibid., 267-8, 270.

In view of the fecklessness of most of its members, it is hardly surprising that the National Amalgamated Seamen's and Firemen's Union collapsed very rapidly. From a membership claimed to be 60,000 in 1889 it fell to 20,000 in 1892, 15,000 in 1893. (100) Its great contest with the Shipping Federation in 1893 completed its downfall. Once they had combined, the owners proved too strong. Making their preparations many months beforehand, they planned -- or so Wilson claims -- that there should be only a few ships at the vital points and thus a great surplus of labour where the struggle would otherwise have been fiercest. Then they took the offensive by requiring the men to register with labour bureaux which they set up to deprive the Union of its control over employment. The Union had no option but to resist, and was soundly defeated. During the course of the contest, Wilson was tied down and financially crippled by legal suits: he was actually in prison when the strike ended in what he considered an unnecessary surrender.

The Union's power was almost gone: few of the members had the strength to remain loyal after such a reverse. Wilson began a whirlwind tour to revive enthusiasm, only to suffer a physical collapse. Later, 1894, when he discovered that his enemies had bought up a large part of the Union's debts and he was involved in further legal cases, he put the "National

100. These figures are not very reliable, being undoubtedly exaggerated, as a great number of "members" paid only their entrance fee.

Amalgamated Seamen's and Firemen's Union of Great Britain and Ireland" into voluntary liquidation and formed a new society - the "National Seamen's and Firemen's Union". But it was many years before this body approached the dimensions of its predecessor. (101)

Another prominent "new" union, mentioned briefly at the beginning to this chapter as being established just before the London Dock Strike, was the National Union of Dock Labourers, centring upon Liverpool. Although its initial strike was hardly successful, the Union increased very rapidly, probably because of the publicity of the London movement, to a membership of 15,000 in Liverpool alone. In addition to what was actually the parent branch in Glasgow, other branches were established in the north and west, including the Irish ports. Next an attempt was made to confine the work to union members by means of a union badge, but the employers strongly and successfully resisted this device. As a result of this defeat the Liverpool membership fell by two-thirds to 5000. Nevertheless, greatly to Sexton's astonishment - he had not been well impressed with the calibre of the members - the Union survived, to become a permanent force. (102)

101. Wilson, 238, 284.

102. Sexton: Sir James Sexton, Agitator, 93-107.

In many respects the National Union was similar to Tillet's London Dockers. There is little trace of socialism in its history. As has already been stated in considering the Seamen's Union, its founders - McHugh and McGhee - were followers of Henry George and strongly opposed to socialism; and the politics of the mass of the dockers were determined by the fact that they were preponderantly Irish. Until the Parnell crisis, Sexton, who had been strongly influenced by Michael Davitt and T. P. O'Connor, was an active worker in the Irish Party. He became President of the local Home Rule Organisation. But when the Irish Nationalists were instructed to support the Liberals, the fact that so many of the leading Liverpool Liberals were employers and bitter antagonists of the Union gave him serious qualms. Asked to stand for the Bootle Town Council "in the Labour interests... which really meant the interests of the Irish and the dockers" he first declined out of loyalty to the alliance with the Liberals. When the other candidates appeared, however, and proved to be dock employers and rapacious builders, he changed his mind and consented. "We had the backing," he states, "of the representatives of the local branch of the Labour Representation Association composed of revolting Liberals": apparently he was not alone in his attitude. The dockers themselves, however, preferred the Irish to the Labour cause:

O'Connor spoke against him, and he was soundly defeated. (103)

The main interest of the Liverpool Labour politicians at this time was to raise the standard of housing, and they were fought desperately every inch of their path by interested members of the Councils. In 1892, as described elsewhere, Sexton became one of the foundation members of the Liverpool ILP, which was formed by a group of seven who responded to Joseph Burgess's invitation to forward their names for this purpose to the Workman's Times. (104) But the spreading Independent Labour movement of this time, of which this Liverpool body formed a part, was not yet under Hardie's leadership nor avowedly socialist. It was not until the end of the century that the Labour Independent movement became a political force in Liverpool. Until then the main issue of working-class politics remained the religious one. The large Irish element, which preponderated among the unskilled workers, paid heed only to their own Nationalist leaders, who of course generally supported the Liberals, and A.T. (later Sir Archibald) Salvidge held the Protestants to the support of the Tories by making his Conservative Workingmen's Association the main instrument of anti-Catholicism. (105)

Thus the old party ties remained even firmer in Liverpool

103. Sexton, 83.

104. Ibid., 127-8.

105. J. Salvidge: Salvidge of Liverpool.

than in the rest of the country.

The political activities of the National Dockers' Union were collectivist rather than socialist. After its defeat over the use of the badge, the Union adopted the method of petitioning Parliament for safety measures, particularly for the extension of the factory acts to the docks and for favourable amendment of the Employers' Liability Act. T. P. O'Connor was its main spokesman in the Commons, and illustrated his speeches by means of ship models that Sexton had made for him. Although Parliament was very slow to move - for many years the only part of a ship that came under the factory acts in law was the half alongside the wharf - Sexton claims that the accident rate was reduced by half. The Union also did very valuable work for its individual members in obtaining compensation payments for them. (106) But all this is quite "old unionist" in tone.

One other characteristic of the National Dockers' Union must be noted: its members were quite as feckless and irresponsible as Tillett's dockers or Wilson's seamen. Wornied beyond endurance by the unending necessity for combatting venomous and ridiculous intrigues, McHugh and McGhee were driven to resign from the Union in 1893, and when Sexton then took up the Secretaryship, he found the organisation

in "a most unholy mess". And this was after the defeat over the badge system, which he claims had purged the Union of its worst ne'er-do-wells and left a solid core of the better-class dockers. The branches, each consisting of a group of dockers who were specialists in the handling of some particular type of cargo, had been allowed considerable autonomy, sending only $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per member of their weekly subscriptions to the head office, and had scandalously abused it. One branch, for instance, had used its funds to take all its members to the Isle of Mann to hold its annual meeting; the officials of others had been making fantastic misappropriations. As soon as he attempted to check these abuses, Sexton was subjected to the ungrateful slander that had proved too much for McHugh and McGhee. The story of the senseless, short-sighted animosities he had to counter makes almost incredible reading. In addition the Union was riddled with religious, political and national hatreds. It is a very sorry tale, and helps to explain why it was that the Liverpool Trades Council looked on this "new" body rather askance. (107)

One other "new" union deserves separate attention: the National Amalgamated Union of Labour. This body, a general labourers' organisation, was founded, as has already

been mentioned, at Newcastle in February, 1889, also before the London Dock Strike. It extended over the north-east and into Scotland, where it succeeded after many of the other "new" unions had failed. Little is heard of any interest in politics on the part of this union until towards the end of the 90's, when its quiet, capable secretary, A. T. Dipper, came forward as a Labour candidate. Although it had many branches in Yorkshire, it seems to have taken little part in the early development of the ILP there. The minutes of its meetings show none of the "new" histrionics of the London bodies but reveal the business-like, matter-of-fact negotiation, planning, and settlement of difficulties of the soundly established "respectable" union. And, as one would infer from this, the Union does seem to have exercised considerable power in face of the employers. (108)

Possibly a difference in temperament between the north-countryman and the southerner may be partly responsible for this characteristic of the NAUL. Another reason is probably that in addition to the sanitary workers, general labourers and other groups of the lowest grades of labour in its ranks the Union contained a large number of the semi-skilled, such as hammermen, holders-up and engineers' labourers. The position of these workers, since they could not readily be

108. Some of the Minutes are obtainable in the Newcastle Public Library.

replaced at short notice and were not greatly subject to the competition of ordinary casual labour, gave them some real bargaining strength. They were more or less permanent hands and developed an esprit de corps which was difficult even for the gasworkers, most of whom were temporarily discharged every summer. Moreover even the casual labour market of an industrial city like Newcastle or the other centres of the north-east was rather different from the mass of demoralised ne'er-do-wells that were drawn into the slums of London, Liverpool or Glasgow.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to notice that the Union twice by large majorities rejected a proposal to admit men who had picked up some skill in a trade such as engineering but who were ineligible to join the craft union. Here again is exclusiveness on the part of a "new" union, yet directed against a higher grade of labour. (109) On another occasion the executive debated the question of the admission of a former file-cutter who was doing labouring work, eventually accepting his plea that his trade was now extinct in the area. (110) These tradesmen's helpers saw their interests as their own, and were afraid to compromise them by the introduction of a heterogeneous element into their counsels.

109. Webb Collection, A XLII, 45.

110. Minutes of Executive Council, April 6-27, 1894, 16.

The Union did interchange membership cards with the Navvies' Union, but only after careful consideration and under certain conditions which restricted the concession to navvies engaged in building work. And when a large group of corporation workers asked for the entrance fee to be lowered to enable them to join, the Executive refused to make the concession. (111)

Although the rules of the union provided that district committees could call a strike involving fewer than a hundred men, there was some difficulty over unauthorised striking despite the despatch of warning circulars. (112) However this was always a source of trouble even among the best administered unions, and always has been.

No other "new" union seems to merit extensive discussion; but several require brief mention at least. One of these is the General Railway Workers' Union, which was established in the first flush of the movement following the London Dock Strike and grew in spectacular fashion to 7,000 members in a matter of months. Catering for the lower grades of railway workers, mainly platelayers, goods porters and shunters, it was formed partly as a protest against the apparent lethargy of the existing craft bodies of drivers, firemen, signalmen and minor officials, particularly the largest of them all, the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants. But, although

111. *Ibid.*, 6, 13.

112. *Ibid.*, 7, 8-9.

moderation was almost a tradition of the ASRS, which had been founded and nursed for many years by the wealthy brewer and Liberal M.P., W. Pass, who had always opposed the use of strike-action, this lethargy was due even more to the fact that the Union was powerless in the industrial field. (113)

(Champion first thought the ASRS officials were "trustworthy", and disapproved of setting up the General Union as a separate body; he did not know at the time, however, that the ASRS had refused a request for the admission of the unskilled railway workers, and was thus responsible for the separation.) (114)

As its membership was only a small fraction of the men employed by the railway companies - even of the "grades" it represented - it could be little more than a friendly society. It did on the other hand have a long history of agitation for the improvement of railwaymen's conditions by legislation.

And the railway companies were powerful: even after the ASRS membership expanded from 12,000 in 1888 to 26,000 in 1890 and 40,000 in 1894, the Union found itself unable to match its industrial strength with theirs. For all the militant tone of its spokesmen, who proclaimed at the outset that they intended to establish a "fighting union", unnumbered with

113. G. D. H. Cole and R. P. Arnot: Trade Unionism on the Railways; G. V. Alcock: Fifty Years of Railway Trade Unionism, especially 170, 210-220.
114. Labour Elector, Oct. 19, 1889, 242.

benefits, (115) the General Union could do no better, nor in fact even as well. Unable to approach even the limited strength of its rival - it had 12,000 members in 1891, but fewer than 6,000 by 1893, and fewer than 4,000 by 1894 - it never even attempted a serious contest with the companies.

Part of the General Union's militancy was derived from its close association with Thorne's Gasworkers, who greatly assisted in establishing it. Thorne and his lieutenants were in fact so prominent in its recruiting campaigns that it can almost be regarded as a section of the Gasworkers' Union. The tone of the two bodies is almost indistinguishable. But, unlike the Gasworkers, it was never able to put its precepts into practice, let alone rival their success. Moreover it also resembled the Gasworkers in soon discovering that extreme militancy in its utterances was only foolish irresponsibility. At its second annual conference in November, 1891, its chairman devoted most of his opening address to the subject of strike action.

"The union," he declared,

"had not been formed for striking purposes. Strikes were justifiable only under extreme circumstances, and after other resources at disposal had been used to the very uttermost without avail." (116)

Another prominent union of unskilled workers was the Navvies', Bricklayers', Labourers' and General Workers' Union,

115. 1890 Conference Report.

116. Trade Unionist, Nov. 21, 1891.

founded by John Ward in the London area. Self-educated but an accomplished speaker of most impressive appearance, Ward was once accused at a TUC of being middle-class and thus not a genuine workers' representative, but had himself been a navvy for some years. Although prominent at first in the SDF, he left that body in 1888 and seems to have been a convinced Liberal all the time he was associated with the Union. (He later became a Colonel and Liberal M.P.) The "Navvies Union" claimed only 1,500 members even in 1891 but had 10,000 in 1892, falling to 5,000 by 1894 and remaining at about 3,000 after 1895. It appears to have been a peaceable organisation. (117) And another body which has often been included among the "new" unions, John Hodge's British Steel Smelters, established in 1886, was also rather moderate in its industrial policy, for all the fact that it had several determined contests with the employers. The main efforts of the Union were to abolish the sub-contracting system in the steel industry and unite all steelworkers in one body (it is for this reason that it has at times been regarded as a "new" union). But, since steel-making required less skill than ironfounding, but more highly disciplined team work, this

117. The Webbs (Trade Unionism, 439) state that this body was founded in 1890; Clayton, 29, states that Ward left the SDF in 1888 in order to found it. In any case it was very small until 1892.

strategy was really dictated by the nature of the industry, which was of course a fairly recent development, and it was certainly not associated in Hodge's mind with any unorthodox political theory. He was constantly appealing for the creation of conciliation and arbitration boards, and was always ready to see the point of view of the employers, with many of whom he found it natural to establish friendly relations, while remaining the most unremitting advocate of his men's advancement. Although prominent in the ILP from its inception and several times an ILP parliamentary candidate in the first years, he had originally been a Liberal and always in reality seemed to remain one, explaining socialism to his audiences as a mere slight extension of "gas and water" municipal collectivism. In almost every respect he was an "old" unionist in outlook. (After accepting office during the 1914-18 war, he was to remain in the Liberal Party). (118) For many years the Union was comparatively small: it had 3,119 members in 1890, but then fell again below the 3,000 mark until 1896. By 1889 it numbered almost 10,000 members.

Another "new" union that attained some size and survived the depression of the mid-nineties was the National Amalgamated Labourers' Union. As was mentioned at the beginning of this

118. J. Hodge: From Workman's Cottage to Windsor Castle.

chapter, this body apparently originated among the Swansea dockers in 1888; but its strongest branch was established in Cardiff in June, 1889, just before the London Dock Strike. It gathered 700 members within a few months. Consisting almost entirely of engineers' and boilermakers' labourers, but with some builders' labourers' and dockside workers' branches in some towns, it quickly spread all over South Wales. Although its relations with the employers were soon apparently cordial, it came into conflict with Tillet's Dockers and the engineers and boilermakers. Its members adopted an exclusive policy against the advice of their secretary, an engineer named Kenny, who was himself a member of the ASE. Similarly the ASE and Boilermakers' local secretaries were ready to eliminate practices inimical to the labourers, but had difficulty in obtaining the agreement of their members. (119)

One more "new" union, a body that attracted some attention at the high tide of the movement, should be mentioned - the ill-fated Postmen's Union. Being very poorly paid, many receiving less than 18s. a week, the postmen had cause for grievance, and in 1890 sought aid from Burns, Champion, and J. L. Mahon. A start was made with forming a union, but

unfortunately disputes broke out on questions of policy. Eventually it was Mahon who became secretary, Burns and Champion being driven from the executive, together with others who had been giving valuable assistance. Mahon now foolishly concentrated upon a side-issue. Already the letter-sorters had formed the Fawcett Association, led by W. C. Clery, which had gradually won the concession of permission to hold public meetings, with the stipulation that an official Post Office reporter be present. A similar right was available to the Postmen but, rejecting the advice of the Fawcett Association to act with diplomatic restraint, and thus losing its invaluable support, Mahon insisted upon holding meetings without observing this restriction, in defiance of the Department's regulations. After repeatedly and unnecessarily provoking the authorities to take repressive measures, eventually on July 10 he called a strike. Apparently he believed, very mistakenly, that despite Clery's opposition the sorters would come out in sympathy. All the arrangements were mishandled; there was no co-ordination and Mahon failed to be at the scene of action when leadership was needed. Prompt counter-measures by the higher Post Office officials competed an inglorious rout. Four hundred and thirty-five men were dismissed or suspended, George Howell performing a valuable service over the next few years in quietly obtaining

their gradual reinstatement. It was a most discreditable incident, but not untypical of a good deal of "new" unionism. (120)

Can any general conclusions regarding the contribution of the "new" unions to the development of the political labour movement be drawn from this survey?

In the first place, apart from the Gasworkers' Union and the NAUL of Newcastle, which were composed of a sturdy type of men with notable esprit de corps, capable of wielding real industrial power against the employers, most of the "new" unions were really premature. Although partly at least the product of the spread of education and new dignity among the working-class, they showed that this social revolution had hardly advanced far enough at their level. They were barely able to stand on their own feet, and it can well be argued that only the great good fortune that brought success to the London Dockers had enabled so many of them to set up permanent organisations as early as they did. It is scarcely true therefore that they had demonstrated, as has often been said, that the lowest grades of workers could now fend for themselves. Perhaps the confidence they gave that this was

120. H. G. Swift: *The History of Postal Agitation, 1840-99*, Ch. XVII; also the *People's Press* of this period, esp. May-June, 1890; and G. Brooks: *Industry and Property, 60-2*.

possible was of some importance, even though mistaken. But it seems more likely that their discovery by about 1892 that they were in fact in a perilous position contributed something to the new emphasis on the need for political action that began to emerge at about that time. In any case, as will be seen later, this new stress would have been made without them, and probably just as quickly. In fact the militant tone of the "new" unionists appears to have caused a reaction towards moderation among the "old" unionists that delayed it.

The supposed distinction between "new" and "old" unions that the former fostered the conception of "working-class consciousness" whereas the latter were exclusive, seeking merely to guard the interests of their particular craft groups, has not a great deal of foundation in fact. Certainly the propaganda of the "new" unionists may have helped to spread this conception; but the same could be argued of the "old" unionists, who in their oratorical mood liked to refer to themselves as "horny-handed sons of toil", "labourers" who were "worthy of their hire". In practice many of the "new" unions - the dockers especially - were most exclusive. And although some of the others regarded themselves as "general" unions - they existed primarily for the protection of particular groups of workers. Thus there were practically

no "general" branches: each branch catered for the members in a certain industry or factory. For instance the Gasworkers had 16 branches in Bristol in 1890 divided as follows: No. 1 Branch was the Bristol Gasworkers, No. 2 the Bath Gasworkers, No. 3 the Galvanisers, No. 4 the Chocolate Workers, No. 5 the Cotton Workers, No. 6 Oil and Colour Workers, No. 7 the Boxmakers, No. 9 the Chemical Workers, No. 10 the Tanners, No. 11 the Potters, No. 13 the Spelter Workers, No. 14 the Street Cleansers, No. 16 the Pipe Makers, No. 17 the Cab Drivers No. 18 the Soap Workers, and No. 19 Branch the Curriers and Tanners. (121)

The same type of organisation was adopted by the other "general" unions: unity gave strength to these small groups of workers, but the point was one of expediency rather than principle. Expediency could of course lend conviction to their rationalisations in the field of political theory. But the "new" unions did not regard the lowest grades of the community as their particular responsibility - not, at least, to any significant degree - any more than the craft workers had regarded the labourers as theirs.

Although little of the political thought they expressed, with the exception of the Gasworkers, was very different from

121. People's Press, May 24, 1890. See also Economic History Review, Second Series, Vol. I, Nos. 2 and 3: E. J. Hobsbawm: The General Labour Unions.

much that the "old" unionists had already been employing, there was perhaps a certain difference in emphasis and tone. Partly this may have been due to individual personalities -- the difference between the vague, propagandist opening address of the shrewd, practical chairman of a craft union conference before the real business was begun, sincere enough, but mostly for the press, and the high-flown sermonising of a Tillet or Mann. The main ability of these two dockers' leaders was literary, and they had not been compelled, like the craft officials, to rise gradually from the ranks through the net-work of subordinate offices. But their personalities were responsible for their position. It was the ability to inspire that was necessary for a "new" unionist leader, to hold the membership together, and win new recruits as the old lost interest. (There was a very rapid "turnover" in the membership of the "new" unions.)

These inspirational qualities had to take the place of industrial strength. The "new" unions were always tremendously handicapped by the inability of their members to contribute adequate subscriptions, in addition to the weakness of their bargaining power from the very cause that they had no craft. Moreover, they were fighting the battles for recognition that the craft unions had passed through

several decades ago, when their struggle had been almost as arduous. Because the "old" unions were strong, the employers were reluctant to enter upon a contest with them, and thus they could employ pacific methods. Almost all of the "new" unions' strikes were forced upon them. They were an indication of general weakness.

The militancy of the "new" unions was associated with their rejection of friendly benefits! but their main reason for not adopting the benefit system was the simple one that their members could not afford it. There seems to be considerable truth in Howell's charge that their leaders simply did not understand the industrial aspect of the benefit system - in any case they cried "sour grapes", and tried to make a virtue of necessity. (The lack of benefits made it still more difficult of course to hold the unions together). Even so the militant attitude, together with a good part of their more spirited propaganda, disappeared soon after the first flush of their lucky victory had faded and the unions began to realize their own weakness and the true interests of their followers. And already by this time most of the unions themselves or else some of their branches had begun modest benefit systems.

The weaker the union, the more militant in tone and the more socialistic. Although of course this cannot be applied

with any rigidity - the Gasworkers again are a notable exception - this generalisation is on the whole quite a valuable one. It applies particularly to the host of small local unions of unskilled workers that were very prominent in the Trades and Labour Councils that sprang into being up and down the country after 1889, finding in these bodies an outlet for the energies repressed by their industrial weakness, and often wielding an influence disproportionate to their strength. The number of Councils rose from about 46 in 1888 to about 130 in 1892, and in many cases the Webbs discovered that about half the delegates were sent by labourer's unions. (122)

(The proportionate representation of the craft workers on these bodies was weakened by the reluctance of many national unions, more especially before the middle of the 90's, to permit their branches to affiliate to Trades Councils. Since their policies were planned on the national scale, they were afraid of difficulties arising). It was largely for this reason that the Councils were always on the advanced wing at the Trade Union Congresses, and that the "old" unionists excluded them in 1895. There was considerable justification for the charge that they tended to be bodies of politicians rather than trade unionists.

Apart from these attributes of general weakness, there was no essential difference between the "old" unionism and the "new". In all the 700 pages of "Industrial Democracy" the Webbs make practically no reference to the methods or constitutional structure of any of the unions of unskilled workers, simply because they were not essentially different from the rest. As Fabians, interested particularly in government and taking delight in analysing the elaborate constitutional machinery and methods of making full use of their strength in industry that the workers had devised for themselves, the Webbs rightly saw the "new" unions only as more primitive copies of the older bodies. Similarly there was sound judgment in Thomas Burt's summary:

"The difference between the old unionism and the new is chiefly that the new unionism is wanting in experience... (The new unions)... hardly have their right of existence recognised... they have no weapon but strikes..."(123)

This point was generally appreciated among the "old" unionists and gives considerable justification to their suspicion of "new" unionism.

On the more purely political side there was also little essential difference. While the Lib-Labs were by no means as subservient to the Liberals as they have been painted, the "new" unions seem to have made little contribution to socialism. Few of them show much trace of socialist

123. A. Watson: A Great Labour Leader, 183-6.

inspiration, and most are rather indeterminate in their political thought. Few are very noticeably more collectivist than the "old" unions. Moreover only a small proportion of ILP members, even among the rank and file, seem to have come from the lowest grades of labour: the ILP was largely artisan, with a prominent sprinkling of the middle-class, especially among its leaders. And this is probably true also of the provincial branches of the SDF, which seem to have been similar in composition. In fact most of the rank and file of the "new" unions -- of the dockers and seamen for instance -- were too irresponsible to have real political interests. On the other hand the difficulty experienced by the "new" unions in finding enough men of sufficient ability within their own ranks to become officials resulted in many of their leaders being middle-class outsiders whose views were not typical of the workers: this was a further reason for the expulsion of the Trades and Labour Councils' delegates from the TUCs in 1895.

To the extent -- and it does not seem to have been very marked -- that the "new" unionists did place more stress than the "old" upon achieving gains through legislation, this was largely because of their weakness. They had little to lose; on the other hand, there was some justification for the "old" unionists' misgivings about the introduction of a precedent

for "interference". There was no real difference in principle. Similarly, the "new" unionists sometimes adopted a militant tone because the employers were ready to crush them in any case; the "old", insecure for all their greater strength, justifiably feared that militancy might goad the employers into forming combinations of their own and taking strong action in retaliation. It was in fact when this did occur and their industrial position deteriorated that the "old" unions turned more urgently to political action.

In short, it is difficult to find any respect in which the "new" unions made a notable contribution to the emergence of the Labour Party.

As has already been noted, the "new" unions declined very rapidly in membership once the first two years of spectacular success were over and the demand for labour had begun to recede. (As early as December, 1889, Champion had been warning the "new" unions of their weakness, advising them that the dockers' success and the prosperous economic conditions had made progress seem too easy, and chiding them for their recklessness. Already he was looking for a remedy in a general federation of unions. His admonition was thus essentially the same as Howell's and, if less resented, was no more heeded!)

(124) Grouping together the largest -

124. Labour Elector, Dec. 21, 1889; see also several previous editorials.

Tillett's Dockers, the National Dockers, the Gasworkers, the National Amalgamated Union of Labour, the General Railway Workers and the Seamen and Firemen - their combined membership fell from 224,000 in 1890 to 74,000 in 1894. Sixty thousand of this total decline is accounted for by the complete disappearance of the Seamen and Firemen; but this still leaves room for very severe losses on the part of the other unions. Moreover this calculation is made from the figures returned to the Board of Trade, which in many cases notoriously exaggerated the membership of these "new" bodies in the worst years. And these are the largest unions: most of the smaller ones disintegrated completely. Generally speaking the decline was directly proportional to the degree of militancy and irresponsibility. Thus the Seamen disappeared (to revive later on a much smaller scale); Tillett's Dockers fell from their 57,000 of 1890 to 30,000 as early as 1891, and had fewer than 10,000 by 1894. (After remaining at this level until the end of the century, their numbers then began to steadily rise again). The National Dockers had about 25,000 in 1890, 13,000 the following year, and about 8,500 in 1892, rising to about 10,000 for the next four years and then to 14,000 in 1897, remaining at about this strength until after 1900.

The General Railway Workers, who claimed 12,000 in 1891, had

declined to fewer than 4,000 by 1894, and then remained at this level until after the turn of the century. (After 1894 therefore, they were of no considerable importance).

On the other hand the Gasworkers, who, if militant, were at least comparatively businesslike and had solidarity and, in their main industry at least, were less susceptible to economic fluctuation, dropped from their 1889 figure of 36,000 only to a lowest membership of 23,500 in 1895, and were back to 40,000 in 1897, 48,000 in 1899. And the NAUL, after declining from 35,000 in 1890 to 25,000 in 1891, remained at a level of about 21,500 for the rest of the decade.

Naturally, with a total membership of only 74,000, this main groups of "new" unions did not exercise much influence in the Trades Union Congresses, which from 1894 onwards consisted of representatives of more than a million unionists. In their early strength they had shown most interest in their industrial possibilities: if now in their weakness they turned more definitely to the need for political action, this, as will be seen, was no more than a change of heart that also occurred among a large proportion of the "old" unionists. (125)

125. P. de Roussiers: The Labour Question in Great Britain, 362, found the "new" unions no more socialistic than the "old". He relates the degree of socialism to the industrial weakness of the particular union, whether it be "new" or "old", and generally speaking his findings are fairly plausible. He also states (370) that the marked growth in the use of conciliation machinery noted by Burnett in his 1893 Labour Department Report was due mainly to the great extension of unionism - i.e. largely to the emergence of the "new" unions.

These too were suddenly given evidence during the minutes that they were insufficiently strong in industry.

CHAPTER 12.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY.

(a). Precursors of the I.L.P.

When it emerged in 1893, the Independent Labour Party was not a completely new development. For some years previously there had been indications that a national, independent Labour political organisation was about to appear. In many districts local precursors of the ILP had emerged, already showing many of its characteristics. Although one naturally and justly associates the ILP with the work of Keir Hardie - whose contribution will be dealt with at length in the second section of this chapter - most of these bodies seem to have come into existence quite apart from his influence. Thus their emergence is of considerable significance. From the debates on Labour representation at the Trades Union Congresses, it was obvious, ~~has~~ has been noticed, that many delegates who supported the formation of the Labour Electoral Association in 1886 wanted a greater degree of independence from the Liberals than Threlfall and Harford intended. Thus in the first place some ILA branches seem to have pursued a firmer policy than that of the national leaders. But in other parts bodies were also appearing with titles of Labour Party, Labour Union, Labour League and so on

which were quite separate from the LEA and took up a similar, more independent attitude.

In 1888, shortly after his breach with the SDF, H. H. Champion began publication of the "Labour Elector" as a propaganda instrument for the formation of an independent Labour Party. Easily gaining control of the insignificant London branch of the LEA, he renamed it the "National Labour Party".⁽¹⁾ In addition, he was apparently the moving spirit behind a meeting called in September of that year during the TUC, attended by Hardie, Mann, Barry, Bateman, John Hodge and a number of "old" unionists, to discuss the formation of a national political organisation. The majority of those who were present, however, were in favour of first giving the LEA a fair trial before attempting to set up another body.⁽²⁾

In the same year J. L. Mahon, one of Champion's lieutenants, issued pamphlets advertising a "Labour Union" with a London office, whose object was also the formation of a "Political Labour Party independent of existing parties." Little trace of this body survives: for all its display of resources - typical of ventures associated with Champion - it seems to have had no rank and file.⁽³⁾ Similarly, although Champion's National Labour Party claimed to have

-
1. Clayton, 65-66.
 2. W. J. Davis: II, 6.
 3. Clayton, 67-8.

a branch in Maidstone which ran no candidates of its own but issued judgments for and against the candidates of the other two parties at various elections, it seems, even from its own propaganda organ, the Elector, to have had very little basis of public support. The London and Maidstone branches were the only ones established: despite this fact and much to the LEA's annoyance, by December, 1888, Champion was using the title of "National Labour Electoral Association" as an alternative to "National Labour Party". (The LEA, which had originally employed the prefix "National", had decided to discard it earlier in the year).⁽⁴⁾

In August, 1889, when it had become the official organ of the London dockers during their great strike, the Elector announced that its Committee of Management comprised Champion as Editor, John Burns as Treasurer, Tom Mann as Secretary, with George Bateman, W. Parnell, Hardie and Tillett as the other members.⁽⁵⁾ There is little sign of their influence, although Cunninghame-Graham contributed frequent articles. By the end of the month it had also become the official organ of the Gasworkers; but both unions were soon to have other journals - the Dockers their own "Record" and the Gasworkers the "People's Press". Several contemporaries

4. Labour Elector, December 15, 1888.

5. August 24.

testify that for a time at least the Elector was becoming widely read and was bidding fair to become a real force. But Champion began to pursue side issues - personal attacks on certain London Radicals - that were of little interest to the Labour movement, and his influence waned. In the November 30 issue it was reported that the "National LEA" had held its annual meeting at which Parnell had been elected Secretary, Clementina Black, Treasurer, and an executive had been appointed consisting of Bateman, W. A. Chambers, Champion, Pete Curran, F. J. Finn, Fred Hammill, Mrs. A. Hicks, Mann and G. W. Patterson. Yet the organisation seems to have died early in 1890, actually before Champion left for Australia.

Although Champion may have been the first prominent figure to attempt to form a completely independent Labour party which would not be specifically socialist, the idea was in the air in any case. As has been seen, it had been expressed by many speakers at the TUCs in the mid-eighties, and it was the basis of many of the Labour political groups that were coming into existence. In Bristol, for instance, as early as May, 1885, a Labour League was formed by the Trades Council alongside the existing Bristol Socialist Society, and until 1890 it pursued a completely independent

path in local politics. The history of this predecessor of the ILP, which has been recorded in detail in pamphlet form, seems so significant as to be worth consideration at length.

Although it included socialists (membership was confined - not without some dissension - to wage-workers), this Bristol Labour League was not a socialist body; but it was very "class-conscious" in tone. In January, 1886, for instance, when despite Liberal appeals it persisted in running a candidate for the School Board (the Liberals eventually withdrawing one of their men and so avoiding a contest), the League published a manifesto as follows:

"We are not fighting this election for merely a seat on the School Board - that is important enough we know; but we are determined that a principle shall be planted on that Board which will strongly protest against the domination of the so-called upper classes over the working-class - a protest against that which has brought the workers to the fearful state in which we today find them. This is a precursor of greater things, the workers have at last awakened to the fact that to be shuttlecock between the Tory and Liberal battledress is not endurable any longer, and it is as well to take warning now that Labour for the future must not be ignored."

In April, 1886, it declared:

"... for working men to accept the social and political patronage of the upper and middle classes is the greatest degradation that can be submitted to, and is nothing less than a venal prostitution of their liberties. ... This movement is not made in any

spirit of revenge against the upper classes...
 Forgiveness of the past must be the democratic
 watchword coupled with a fiery determination that
 for the future, that order of things which would
 warrant one section of humanity grinding another
 to death shall cease to be." (6)

In June, 1886, the League attempted to run a candidate for Parliament, but after several meetings had to withdraw from inability to raise the money needed. Next it contested a seat on the City Council, its candidate opposing the Mayor but falling by only 26 votes. In the following year two candidates were run for the Council, one being successful, defeating both a Liberal and a Conservative. In 1888 the League again had two candidates for the Council, but both were defeated; and both the League and the Socialist Society ran candidates for the School Board. For School Board elections the electors could give all their votes to one, two or more candidates, and there was a dispute between the two societies - without much heat, however - as to the best instructions to give to their supporters: eventually the Socialist - H. H. Gore - was second from the top of the poll while the League candidate was unsuccessful. (7)

In 1890, again on the initiative of the Trades Council, the League gave place to a Bristol Labour Emancipation League,

6. S. Brydger: An Account of the Labour and Socialist Movement in Bristol, 34, 37-8.
7. Ibid., 38-9, 43.

whose object was

"the economic and political emancipation of the workers by returning to parliament and local governing bodies persons pledged to the programme of the League, and by any other method conducive to such emancipation." (8)

Following their practice with the Labour League, the Socialists promised their support, but again decided to keep up a separate existence as well. There followed a curious incident at a parliamentary by-election that took place shortly afterwards. The League officials and socialists (some of whom played a very active part in aiding the "new" unionism in Bristol) were too busy with the very numerous strikes that were in progress at this time - the height of the "new" unionist wave in Bristol - to organise a campaign, but an "Organising Committee" co-operated with a local "Miners' Committee" to run W. Whitefield, a miners' official, the Miners' Committee providing the money. A few days before the polling date, Whitefield became ill and withdrew: J. H. Wilson offered to take his place, the Seamen's Union meeting his expenses. Although the offer was refused on the ground of lack of time, he entered the contest nevertheless. As had been freely predicted, the result brought little credit to Labour, Wilson receiving only 602 votes to 4,775 for the Liberal and 1,900 for the Conservative. For

8. Ibid., Part II, 27: the People's Press, July 26, 1890.

some reason this action of Wilson's aroused deep enmity in the movement:

"returning home after the declaration of the poll, the shoemakers and colliers simply buried us with turf and stones. All the glass of the cab was broken, and we were all glad when we reached quieter quarters." (9)

The charge made against him was that he was discrediting the movement by going to the poll under such a handicap: possibly this was in fact the real source of the ill-feeling - certainly it seems to have been after the poll, when the full measure of defeat was known, that the worst violence was used. And if this is the case the incident throws some light upon the depth of feeling that could be roused over an action that appeared to discredit the cause and helps to account for the bitterness of the opposition to Hardie later. A hint that Whitefield's excuse of illness was only a screen for his failure to arouse sufficient support also sheds light on the animosity in this instance. (10)

In 1891 the League candidate for the City Council was again returned, but a second candidate in the same ward was badly defeated. In explanation the historian of their early movement in Bristol comments that there was a widespread feeling among the workers in the ward that one representative was their due and that they should not expect more! (11)

9. Bruyher, II, 26-7; the People's Press, May 10, 17, 1890.

10. Ibid., II, 26-7.

11. Ibid., II, 28.

Bristol took no part in the formation of the ILP in 1893, and did not affiliate with the new body. Nevertheless in the same year there was a further local development. In 1892 and 1893 there had been a large number of unsuccessful strikes among the host of "new" unions in the town marked by considerable hostility on the part of the authorities. The most striking incident had been on "Black Friday", December 23, 1892, when the police and cavalry charged a Christmas Eve demonstration, injuring 57. According to the local historian:

"The experiences of the strikes, the lock-outs and Black Friday and the general treatment received at the hands of their masters drove home to the workers the lesson that more union in industrial action must be supplemented by similar political unity."

Thus socialists and unionists combined to replace the League by a "Bristol Labour Electoral Association". Again this was not a socialist body, and again the Bristol Socialist Society, although very prominent in its activities, maintained a separate existence as well. The position of the Association was well illustrated in 1895 when it was seeking a parliamentary candidate. After there had been some difficulty in finding a suitable man, D. J. Holmes, the Conservative chairman of the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress, was suggested and strongly approved

by the trade unionist members. When the socialists opposed his nomination, the unionists reminded them that they (the trade union section) "had raised no objections to the Socialist opinions" of previous candidates; and, admitting the justice of this argument, the Socialists ultimately had to give their consent. Holmes eventually withdrew, however, for other reasons. (12)

Meanwhile a second curious illustration of the position of the Socialists occurred. Although he had lost the official backing of the Socialist Society over his objection on religious grounds to the appointment of a Jewish teacher by the School Board, Gore was again in 1895 returned at the head of the poll. And, contesting a parliamentary by-election the same year, he was defeated by only 132 votes. At the general election a few months later a LEA candidate was put forward for the same constituency, but received only half as many votes as Gore had obtained in this previous campaign.

By this time it had been decided to link up with the ILP. Although the first attempt to establish an ILP branch failed after a few months, a strong and permanent branch was established as a result of this contest in the general election. (13)

12. Bruyher, II, 51, 55.

13. Ibid., II, 55-7.

Bristol is a clearly documented case of the rise of a local independent Labour political movement long before 1893; unfortunately there are no other centres for which local developments have been recorded in such detail. There are hints, but hints only, with little detailed evidence, that several LEA branches adopted a similar very independent attitude. After 1889 - no particular significance attaches to this date: there is little trace of any very close connection between these political developments and the rise of the "new" unions - a number of Labour journals came into existence and thus the movement can be more clearly traced from that time onwards.

One of the earliest centres to stir was Newcastle-upon-Tyne. As early as 1888, as mentioned in an earlier chapter, three Labour candidates won seats upon the Newcastle School Board, their position being sufficiently independent of Liberalism for charges of "Tory gold" to be raised against them. And in September, 1890, it was reported that a Labour Electoral Association was about to be formed. Although there was already a small "Labour Party" in the city in addition to a branch of the SDF, the membership of these two bodies was practically the same and the Trades Council had refused to co-operate with either: the purpose

in forming the new Association was to make a further attempt to obtain its support. (15) The manoeuvre, however, was apparently a failure: two candidates for the Town Council were badly defeated, a Workman's Times correspondent giving the reason that they were both socialists who were of no account in their unions and had abused unionism. (The writer, who thought socialism impracticable, asserted nevertheless that the only solution to the Labour problem lay in "productive and distributive co-operation!") (16)

The Hull Trades Council also decided in August, 1890, to contest a City Council seat, one of its aims being to establish a free public library. (17) By January, 1891, the Leicester Trades Council had returned two representatives to the Town Council and three to the School Board, despite the fact that the Trades Council included members of both Parties. (18) In the same month it was also reported that a "Labour Association" had recently been formed in Birmingham. (19) By August the Stockton Trades Council had decided to run candidates for the Municipal Council; (20) a "Labour Representation Committee" was being formed in Nottingham; (21) the Hull Trades Council was now bringing

15. Workman's Times, Sept. 19, 1890.

16. Ibid., Jan. 30, 1891.

17. Ibid., Sept. 19, 1890.

18. Ibid., Jan. 23, 1891.

19. Ibid., Jan. 30, 1891.

20. Ibid., August 14, 1891.

21. Ibid., August 21, 1891.

forward three candidates for the City Council; Barnsley and Hyde Trades Councils were also taking action independent of the Liberals; and the other parties had decided it would be advisable to allow the Stockport Trades Council one seat. (22) Meanwhile a "Labour Electoral Association" was being formed in Salford, this title being chosen to avoid confusion with the Trades Council, which was also bringing forward local body candidates. While the new organisation intended to support the Council, its sponsors thought they could attract many unions which were not affiliated to that body. By adopting a rule that no-one could become a member who was already a member of any other party, the Association showed that its attitude was to be quite independent. (23) In November, however, when the election took place, the Labour candidates for the School Board were found to be at the foot of the poll. (24)

Meanwhile the London Trades Council was engaged in setting up a "Metropolitan Labour Representation League", Crooks, Steadman and Cooper being among the delegates who were most active in this venture. A long programme of 14 clauses was drawn up and agreed to almost without discussion, most of the items being Radical electoral reforms.

22. The Trade Unionist, August 29, 1891.

23. Ibid., October 24, 1891.

24. Ibid., November 21, 1891.

But it also included the democratic reform of the rating system and "(13) Nationalisation of the Land; (14) National Control of all railways, tramways, water, lighting and coal monopolies, and the whole of the means of production." In a discussion on the problem of finance, Steadman stated, in opposing a suggested compulsory annual levy of sixpence for each member from the Council's affiliated unions, that

"They once had a Labour Representation League, with 1/- for annual membership. How many delegates, let alone members of the societies affiliated paid it? Not fifty."

It was urged not only that many members of the unions belonged to political parties and would object to the levy, but also that the unions of unskilled workers would not be able to afford it. Once again the money bogey seemed the main difficulty. The earlier League to which Steadman had referred had apparently achieved very little; the new body was to be little more effective. (25)

In Woolwich there was already a separate Labour Representation League, which was running Pete Curran as a candidate for the London County Council at this time. Its moving spirit was Robert Banner, the Scottish Radical and socialist whose chequered record in advanced politics reached back to 1870. A working shoemaker whose father had been intimate with Ernest Jones and whose mother was said to have

25. Workman's Times, October 9, 30, 1891.

made hand grenades for the Chartists, Banner had been a close associate of Morrison Davidson, claimed acquaintance with Marx, and had been prominent in the SDF and Socialist League. (26) Although the constituency was a hopeless one for a Labour candidate, Tom Mann was also engaged at this period in his parliamentary campaign for the Colne Valley Labour Union. (27) Further to the north, it was reported that the Carlisle Land and Labour League - "the local Socialists" - who had received an offer of £500 for political purposes, were putting forward an independent candidate and "giving the official Liberals a fright that they will not easily get over". (28) (As was noticed previously, Champion had been active in propaganda work in Scotland in 1887-8 for the Land and Labour League, and the Scottish Labour Party apparently obtained many recruits from this source. The League had once been affiliated to the SDF but went with the Socialist League at the schism, and eventually became an affiliate of the SLP.) (29) And towards the end of the year the Newcastle LEA had been reformed after its earlier fiasco. Although the new body had affiliated with Threlfall's LEA, it was reported to have actually been initiated by the local SDF branch and to be much less

26. Ibid., Nov. 14, Dec. 5, 1891.

27. Ibid., October 31, 1891.

28. Ibid., Dec. 12, 1891.

29. Clayton, 29, 31.

compromising than the national body in its attitude to the Liberals. Nevertheless, when the School Board election took place shortly afterwards the three Labour representatives lost their seats. (30)

Another organisation occasionally referred to in the Labour journals of this time is the "Labour Army", a body founded by Frank Smith, Hardie's closest intimate and a former Commissioner in the Salvation Army, on Salvation Army lines. For a few months in 1891 it published the "Workers' Cry". At the end of 1891 a Glasgow branch of this body had been established, with clergy prominent among its supporters, its declared main object being the formation of an independent political party. This branch also was active in the Scottish Labour Party. (31)

At Huddersfield there was a "Labour Union" in existence by December, 1891. Approached by the Liberals regarding its intentions for the School Board elections, this body debated the issue of co-operation or complete independence solely in terms of expediency. Although the Liberal offer to include a Labour nominee on the Party ticket had imposed no conditions whatsoever, the Union eventually decided by a large majority that even the appearance of dependence should be strictly avoided. (32) And in January,

30. Workman's Times, Dec. 12, 1891; Trade Unionist, Jan. 23, 1892.

31. Workman's Times, Dec. 26, 1891; Workers' Cry.

32. Workman's Times, Jan. 2, 1892.

1892, the Workman's Times published the manifesto of a Cumberland Labour Electoral Association which was very independent in tone. Its programme, however, was hardly more than radical or republican, stressing constitutional reform and proposing nationalisation only for land and minerals. The objective was stated as the "emancipation of Labour from the control of monopolists." (33) At about the same time it was reported that independent local body candidates were being run at Derby; that two Labour candidates at Ipswich, where the co-operative movement was giving full support, had been returned fourth and fifth for the School Board despite the fact that the organisation had been formed only a short time before the election; and that the Leicester Trades Council had returned three members to the City Council, meeting all their expenses. (34)

Another large centre where considerable activity was being shown was Leeds. According to one source, it was dissatisfaction with the actions of both political parties on the question of "fair contracts" that caused the Trades Council to bring forward its own men for the City Council. In any case Leeds had a vigorous group of working-class

33. Ibid., Jan. 16, 1892.

34. Trade Unionist, Jan. 30, 1891; Feb. 6, 1892.

leaders at this time, including J. L. Mahon and Tom Maguire. A worker-poet and early member of the SDF and Socialist League, Maguire appears to have showed marked character and ability, but was to die soon afterwards at the early age of

⁵⁰
35. (35) Although the Council was successful in returning its candidates, it was still in debt over the campaign some months afterwards, and was unable to obtain contributions from its unions to meet the accounts. Thus in November, when the School Board elections were approaching, it was decided to have one candidate sponsored by the Liberals and another by the Tories. Although the proposed Liberal-Labour representative had given good service previously, the Gasworkers objected, however, and brought Mahon forward independently. (36)

The centre in which the new movement took strongest hold, which was to form the spearhead of the ILP, was the neighbouring one of Bradford. Almost entirely given over to its woollen industry, Bradford provided only a poor living for its male workers. By far the largest part of the mill operatives were women and juveniles: thus there was a chronic surplus of men, who were employed as casuals for night work at the oppressively hot task of combing, or at

35. See introduction to "Tom Maguire - a Memoir: Selections from the Prose and Verse Writings of..."

36. Trade Unionist, Aug. 29, Sept. 19, Oct. 3, 1891.

dyeing and sorting. Even when employed as weavers, men had to compete with women and could earn only a maximum of 16/- a week and often, it was claimed, as little as 9/- for a full week's work. Every evening the bulk of the men reported at the mill gates, uncertain as to how many would be taken on, their weakness aggravated by depression in the industry. When fully employed at this night work, they earned 18-20/- a week, but they were rarely so fortunate, and work was very scarce at this particular time.

Another element in the situation at Bradford was the mixed composition of the population, a large part of which was alien to the district. In addition to a large Irish section, there were many descendants of the pauper children who had been brought by the manufacturers from the south-west earlier in the century, and a sprinkling of Jews and Germans who gave unusual stimulus to working-class thought. When P. W. Jowett became a member in the late eighties at the age of 22, there were three Germans in the Bradford Branch of the Socialist League. Altogether, however, there were only twelve members, the workers of the town still resting their faith in the usual radicalism. (37)

37. H. Fenner Brockway: Jowett of Bradford, 29ff; Royal Commission on Labour, 1891-4, XXXV, 6708; XXXVI, 5396-5400 (quoted Hobsbaum: Labour's Turning Point, 75).

In 1888 young Jowett met Hardie at the Bradford TUC, being apparently one of the few unionists who were favourably impressed by him. The following year the Socialist League branch was disbanded and a Labour Electoral Association was formed with Jowett as Secretary. Although Jowett and his original colleagues intended to be completely independent in their political activity, the Association was soon joined by a large Radical element who became in the majority. Shortly afterwards came the London Dock Strike, in aid of which the socialists held demonstrations and made street collections. When, however, it was followed by a strike of the local gasworkers in which the Association officials played an active part, the Radicals gave notice of a question "as to whether this Association is acting in accordance with its constitution in interfering between Labour and Capital." For this reason, and because the majority had voted to support two Liberals for the Town Council, Jowett called no more meetings. Later, against the opposition of a large section of delegates, the gasworkers were admitted to the Trades Council, which became the "Trades and Labour Council."

(38)

Next Jowett and W. H. Drew became active in organising the wool-combers, meeting them as they came out of the mill

38. Brockway, 32.

gates at 6 a.m. The result was the Manningham Strike of 1890-1, a six months struggle that gave birth to the independent Labour movement in Bradford. On the very evening of the day that the police, on the instructions of the Watch Committee, which was of course controlled by the Tory and Liberal mill-owners, broke up a large but orderly strike-meeting in the Post Office Square - the traditional place for open-air meetings - Jowett, Drew, and a small group of colleagues decided in an informal street-corner conversation to set up the Bradford Labour Union. Although the hopeless weakness of the male operatives' position in the woollen industry was enough to render the strike hopelessly futile and point the way to the alternative method of political action, it was actually this interference on the part of the Watch Committee that roused the workers to the point of taking the decisive step. Resentment was so strong that even the radical unionists were eager to run independent Labour men for the Council. Drew became President of the new body, which in May, 1891, renamed itself the Bradford Independent Labour Party; and although members were forbidden any connection with other parties, it rapidly gained real strength.

So confident in fact did the Party become that it was decided to put forward a candidate for East Bradford at the

parliamentary election of the following year. Blatchford was approached and, when his condition that a requisition of a thousand electors be obtained was successfully met, consented to stand. A poor politician, however, he was glad to withdraw for Tillett to take his place. At the poll the strength of the movement was revealed when Tillett gained no fewer than 2749 votes to 3306 for the Liberal and 3053 for the Conservative. By this time there were four branches of the Party in the town and a Labour Church; thus it was natural for Bradford to be chosen as the location of the conference that established the national body. Even so, the Party had been able to return only one man - Jowett - to the Town Council, paying him £2 a week to enable him to perform his duties. (39)

The above account of some of the various bodies that in the late nineties and earlier were emerging in different parts of the country as precursors of the ILP is gleaned mostly from references in the Labour journals of the time. Yet the movement was unco-ordinated and poorly reported. Examination of the biographies of working-class leaders who later achieved national prominence reveals that similar currents were flowing in many more centres, scarcely noticed or completely unknown to these contemporary writers - how

many more towns and cities had their independent Labour movements of which no record remains?

What kind of position - in broad general terms - did these scattered bodies take up on their entry into national politics? Although few of them were avowedly socialist and the movement was a purely Labour movement, distinct from the socialist bodies, most of these organisations seem to have gone to some pains to avoid association with the Liberals. They range in viewpoint from those which regarded the issue of independence as a question purely of expediency to those which avoided even the appearance of co-operation as a matter of principle. One of the contributors to the "Trade Unionist" who saw no reason why Labour and the Liberals should not co-operate since (he asserted) the advocates of "non-interference" had gone over to the Conservatives, stated his attitude as follows: "We must show the Liberal Party that it is worth their while to obtain our support, and the best way of doing this is to work like nails when they accept our candidates." But, he continued, they must be wary of the Liberals; if the Liberals were to support other "Independent Radicals" in contests with Labour men, as had been the case against Ben Cooper at Bow, "we shall have to show our teeth

in a rather ugly manner." (40) This was something less than Hardie's view, and Hardie's leadership was as yet by no means accepted: in discussing the Royal Commission on Labour, another writer in the "Trade Unionist" commented rather patronisingly:

"Mr. Hardie's views may not be quite ideal, and they may lack a certain maturity, but they do recognise the facts of the case." (41)

Similarly, another contributor advised, with the editor's general approval, that since Labour still had little power politically:

"Therefore, I would say to all trade unionists, be strong in yourselves, and trust no-one overmuch, but do not prematurely burn the bridge which still connects you with the Liberal party. Stand out for fair conditions; insist on your choice of representatives, and send members of your own unions to Parliament. Where Liberal leaders refuse you this, fight them, especially now in bye-elections. Show them that you will not be put off like this for ever, but do not hasten to a permanent breach - do not exchange King Leg for King Stork. Watch the Liberals, but do not, if you can help it, let the Tories in."

In particular, he thought that to antagonise the Liberals would result in postponing the enfranchisement of rural labour, which in his opinion held the key to the political future - more often it was payment of members that was mentioned. (42) It was also advice along these lines that

40. Trade Unionist, Feb. 27, 1892.

41. Ibid., Feb. 20, 1892.

42. Ibid., Dec. 5, 1891.

they were receiving from Radical sympathisers. In December, 1891, for instance, Labouchere advised them that

"The question of Labour representation should not be pushed at the forthcoming general election, but all should go for throwing election expenses on the rates, and payment of members, with a second ballot where necessary." (43)

The editor of the Trade Unionist, Vaughan Nash, stated that he favoured independence, but that further propaganda was first needed. (44)

The correspondents of the Workman's Times, which was in fact established by Joseph Burgess in 1891 to link together the scattered bodies that were reaching the stage of independent action, and was published in several different editions for different centres, had most of them reached the point of believing that nothing further of value would be obtained from the Liberals. Although he himself approved of independent tactics, Burgess states that he thought local organisations should be left free to decide whether or not they should work through one of the other parties. (45) One of his writers who asked how much longer the miners were going to wait before leaving the Liberals and acting independently asserted "It is what they will be driven to in the end." (46) But advocacy of independence did not mean

43. Workman's Times, Dec. 26, 1891.

44. Trade Unionist, Sept. 5, 1891.

45. Workman's Times, Aug. 14, 1891.

46. Ibid., Jan. 2, 1892.

that these spokesmen of the advanced movement were necessarily socialists. Another writer asked whom they should look to for leadership:

"To the revolutionary socialist? No; for he is impracticable. To the Anarchist? No; for he too is impracticable. To the Fabian? ... the Fabians must make their minds up, for the time is coming when the workers will look for guidance not in the pages of magazines, but at the polling booths." (47)

In a previous article, the same writer had satirised the typical socialist meeting, painting a picture of a collection of boyish young workers, intermixed with foreigners and a solitary out-of-water Fabian, being harangued by "Mr. Redruin" - a visitor of rather doubtful character - on the impossibilities of trade unionism. (48) Another correspondent introduced his views in this fashion:

"Am I a Socialist? I am and I am not. I am not a Tory. I am not a Conservative. ... I am not a Liberal. ... Am I an individualist? I am and I am not. ... What are my principles? I have none. But I have interests... (Here he briefly described his childhood in a slum). ... O ye great enfranchised, all powerful working classes. You go on day after day suffering wrongs, privation, robbery, and oppression, and yet use not your power to remedy the evils and ills of life you grumble and groan at and sweat under. 'O ye of little faith'. ... You have the power, the franchise. You are (when you know it) the controllers and masters of the nation's purse. Remove taxation from your shoulders. Place it on the backs of those who bear no burdens, and make the landlord class pay and pay again for your improvement until you make it bankrupt and industrious." (49)

47. Workman's Times, Jan. 23, 1891.

48. Ibid., Jan. 30, 1891.

49. Ibid., Jan. 30, 1891.

Until the early part of 1892 all this movement had been largely spontaneous in its growth in the various centres. In the autumn of this year, however, Burgess furthered his plan of bringing some degree of unity into the movement by suggesting in the Workman's Times that those of his readers who wished to form branches of "the Labour Party" should send him their names, whereupon he would put them in contact with each other in the districts where they lived. There were no fewer than 3,500 replies, and 80 new "branches" were formed during the year, most of them as a result of this appeal. (50) To give an instance: James Sexton was one of those who accepted the invitation, and was thereby put in touch with six others who had replied from the Liverpool district, so that a Liverpool "branch" was formed. (51) The remarkable response to this device that Burgess had used reveals that a considerable and widespread section of the workers in the industrial centres had come to favour the independent policy by this time.

One of the most important influences contributing to the growth of these various bodies and leading to the birth of the ILP was Robert Blatchford's "Clarion". As is well known, Blatchford, who as "Funquam" had won a tremendous

50. J. Burgess: John Burns, 250-1.

51. Sexton: Sir James Sexton, Agitator, 83, 127-8.

following for himself in Manchester with his contributions to the Sunday Chronicle, for which he earned the very large salary of £1,000, became a convert to socialism and eventually, after some months, was asked by the proprietor, Edward Hulston, either to exclude socialist propaganda from his articles or else to leave the paper. Together with his close colleague, A. M. Thompson, he left, and after about eight weeks of writing for the Workman's Times, (52) on December 13, 1891, began the Clarion. The other two writers in the famous Clarion quartet were his brother, Montague Blatchford, and E. F. Fay - "The Bounder".

The capital for this venture, practically all of it borrowed, was only £500; and the start was most unpromising. The first issue was almost illegible because of a fault in the press; the posters were washed from the boardings by a deluge of rain; and within a month they were faced with a libel case - which Fay, however, managed to joke out of court. Moreover Hardie had just changed his Labour Leader from a monthly to a weekly, and thus was rivalling the new venture in the same field.

But very quickly the Clarion became an extraordinary success. Very soon - before the conference that founded the ILP in January, 1893, - its circulation had reached 40,000.

52. For his weekly article Burgess paid Blatchford £20.
(Laurence Thompson: Robert Blatchford, 76).

And its influence was unparalleled: it was the most effective agency for making socialists the British Labour movement has known. In Manchester and the surrounding industrial towns, Blatchford was worshipped. It was even a fact that "Nunquam" pipes and caps could be bought in Manchester. Although it was just after the formation of the ILP that he reached his highest point of influence with the publication of "Merrie England", he had already aroused such a wide interest and ardour that he and his paper take a foremost place among the forces that brought the new Party into being. After the appearance of "Merrie England" - a collection of a series of articles from the Clarion which sold to the extent of 20,000 shilling copies almost immediately, and then three-quarters of a million penny copies within a year, and two million copies in the next fifteen years - the circulation of the paper rose rapidly to 60,000. (53)

What was the reason for the Clarion's striking success?

Although its circulation fell over the Boer War period, when its policy was, with qualifications, "imperialist", and after 1903, when Blatchford attacked Christianity, it did not drop below 40,000, and rose again to 90,000 after the election

53. A. N. Lyons: Robert Blatchford; Laurence Thompson:
Robert Blatchford; A. M. Thompson: Here I Lie;
R. Blatchford: My Eighty Years.

victory of 1906. (It fell again rapidly to 10,000 just before 1914 when Blatchford offended his readers by playing a leading part in the agitation for strengthening the navy).⁽⁵⁴⁾ One factor was almost undoubtedly the appeal of the Clarion style of journalism to unsophisticated readers in the days before the popular press. Not until 1894 was the Daily Mail to appear; as yet the newspapers presented their reports in the old, factual, intellectual style. They looked down upon the Sunday Chronicle as being hardly proper. Yet the Sunday Chronicle - or Blatchford's weekly column at least - and later the Clarion, were precursors of the coming revolutionary triumph of the Daily Mail. Blatchford wrote successfully to the masses, in the clear, intimate, simple, personal style, with a light, imaginative touch, that has long been commonplace to us, but was doubly attractive to the workers of his day because he was the first to use it skilfully.

A second factor was Blatchford's idealism - his revolt from materialism - in which he struck the tone of the working class of his time. His plea was for an end to the industrialisation of the country and for a simpler, more earthy life with more leisure and fewer machine-produced luxuries and furnishings. Hardie too, of course, was an idealist, and

54. A. M. Thomson: op. cit., 101, 128, 156.

could stir his audiences with his vision; but there was an un-English fire about him. Blatchford's more dreamy, more genial religion and his manner of sweet reasonableness raised a more sympathetic response among his English readers. (On the other hand, the Clarion never won a following in Scotland).

Further, the Clarion was more than a newspaper -- it was a way of life. While still on the Sunday Chronicle, Blatchford had brought gay parties to the slum children instead of necessities, and round the Clarion there clustered cycling clubs, glee clubs, propaganda vans, soup kitchens and so on, in endless profusion. The famous "Clarion Meets" were riots of good fellowship, for some years completely informal. Though they showed no sign of a knowledge of Marx, the pages of the paper bubbled over with leg-pulling flights of fancy. This was a new, genial, pleasantly vague socialism that brought hope and good cheer into dark places.

Nevertheless, for all the fact that he was the most effective recruiting agent for the independent political movement, Blatchford's influence always had its limits. As will be seen later in this chapter, he was never able to win the ILP over on specific details of policy as Hardie did. His appeal was to generalities -- Blatchford always refused to go into detail about the measures necessary to produce

socialism: first you must spread the right attitude to life. Although it was unsurpassed in winning converts, his recruits were soon hungry for action, and before long would begin to seek more practical advice than his on actual questions of politics.

How - looking across England before the 1893 conference at Bradford - can this rise of an independent Labour political movement almost simultaneously in so many different centres be explained? As the movement was well under way before the Clarion appeared in late 1891, it was certainly not due to Blatchford and his colleagues, although they did give it a remarkable stimulus. Nor, although again this development must have contributed an important impulse, turning attention as it did to the darker side of the social order, did the movement derive its essential origins from the London Dockers' Strike. Nor, despite the fact that a few of those who were prominent in the various groups had apparently been impressed by him, did it owe much to Hardie's influence. He certainly was not recognised as its leader until 1892 at least, and claimed that he had not intended to seek office at the Bradford Conference. Discontent with the social order was becoming rife even before his emergence in 1887. In fact, as was seen in the discussion of the TUCs, the independent Labour

Idea, which in one respect was itself only a revival of the spirit of the seventies, was beginning to appear as early as the middle of the eighties. Dissatisfaction with the Liberals was mounting: it was only a matter of time before independent political bodies would come into existence.

As has been seen, these new bodies had no clear programme beyond a general collectivism that had always characterised Labour political thought and which the workers had long realised was incompatible with Liberalism. But they were now growing more impatient. Their essential motivation was however less a desire for the adoption of new principles of government than a demand for complete political representation - for a share in the direction of the state. They wanted recognition of their own interests and point of view - in short, to become part of the nation - and despaired of obtaining this until their own flesh and blood took part on equal terms in the work of government.

Until the ILP was formed in 1893, there was little or no co-ordination about the movement, and no central direction. There was however one man who, following his first ineffectual efforts in 1888-90 endeavoured again before 1893 to supply a certain element of national co-ordination - H. H. Champion. On returning from Australia in May, 1892, Champion tried to

regain and build upon his old position by obtaining some influence in the Workman's Times, offering to contribute a considerable amount of capital in return for a share in the editorial work. But Burgess would not touch his money. Next, on January 7, 1893, he revived the Labour Elector under the editorship of Maltman Barry, as a rival to Burgess's organ. The Elector, however, does not seem to have won any following. Thereafter Champion's method of working, which he continued even after the ILP, in which he took no open part, was formed, was to operate behind the scenes by offering to supply money to prospective candidates. Although some of this money came from Hudson, the soap manufacturer, there can be little doubt that some of it was "Tory gold", provided by Barry, who on one occasion at least admitted he was a paid Conservative agent. (At the 1892 general election Barry was a "Tory Democrat" candidate for Banffshire - explaining that he did not use the term in Randolph Churchill's sense.) Champion also "intervened" in elections in the name of the ILP in cases, such as a bye-election at Grimsby in 1893, where the ILP had decided to take no action, arguing that he thought this necessary when the ILP neglected its opportunities. He had a considerable following at about this time in Aberdeen, where he published the "Aberdeen Standard"; contesting South

Aberdeen in 1892, he gained 991 votes. But he also maintained agents in many other districts. One of them, J. L. Mahon, was President of the ILP Branch at Leeds, and shortly after the Bradford Conference offered money to the Branch Treasurer, John Lister, who was contesting a Halifax bye-election. When Lister rebuffed him, Mahon wrote to the local newspapers advising the workers to vote for the Liberal. (Although Champion publicly rebuked Mahon for his part in this incident, and appears not to have taken him into regular employment until just afterwards, the whole intrigue smacks very strongly of his techniques.)-

Until at least August, 1892, Champion was still on good terms with Hardie. But before the general election of that year he and Maltman Barry made an appointment with Hardie and Cunninghame-Graham in the House of Commons and offered them funds for a number of Scottish candidatures, on condition that Champion should approve of each item of expenditure. The offer was rejected, and bad feeling resulted. After the Bradford Conference, it of course became necessary to take steps to counteract Champion's intrigues, which were most embarrassing. Branches were warned to be wary of offers of funds - at the Conference a provision had been adopted, specifically to foil Champion, that only unconditional donations be accepted; the

National Administrative Council published a disavowal of his actions (without, however, the signatures of the four Scottish members, who were all Champion men); and Hardie called upon Champion to openly join the Party and submit himself to its discipline. Soon afterwards, however, Champion had one of his agents invited to go on what was ostensibly a lecturing tour of Scottish Labour Party branches, its real purpose being to spy out the land. (Actually four of his men had come to Scotland on these errands). The intrigue was discovered through a letter opened accidentally, and there were heated recriminations.

Although Champion won support from some Scottish groups at a special conference he called in October to retrieve some of his ground, this was virtually the end of his activity in the British Labour movement. By the end of 1893, "fleeced unmercifully", he had left Aberdeen, and in early 1894 he returned to Australia, where he spent his remaining life. (55) To a certain extent his ineffectiveness had been due to his inability to submit his views to majority decision: he was well-meaning, but always too sure he was right. But in any case his tactics had demonstrated a gross

55. Joseph Burgess: Will Lloyd George Supplant Ramsay MacDonald, 59-97; D. Lowe: Souvenirs of Scottish Labour, 148-152.

weakness in powers of judgment which would have prevented him from achieving any lasting success. Hardie had certainly had no option but to combat his influence.

(b). Keir Hardie and the I.L.P.

Of all the socialist bodies in our period, the one that came closest to the trade union movement - whose development belongs most clearly to the centre of the history of the Labour movement proper - was the Independent Labour Party. Partly this was because it was more working-class in its composition - but this was effect rather than cause: the main reason was that to a very large extent the IIP was Keir Hardie.

He was its inspiration to a remarkable degree. Much of the power the utterances of its spokesmen possessed in the Trades Union Congresses and elsewhere was due to the permeation of their ideas with Hardie's thought, which reached depths they could never have plumbed themselves. Except for occasional brief periods when failure to make perceptible progress caused loss of faith among a minority and resulted in a tendency to turn towards short-sighted tactics, his character and intellect seem to have dominated the Party. Time and time again, when they seemed to be approaching a false step, he was able to win the Party conferences to his point of view.

And, although a politician by instinct rather than a trade unionist, Hardie was working-class to the core - as has

not often been true of other socialists. He was a worker in his dress, appearance and habits, in the brusque "men" or "men and women" with which he began his addresses, and in his manner of speaking - the stiff, unmannered pose, the halting but striking sentences that occasionally wrung themselves into fierce eloquence, the intense earnestness -

"the strange inward something that makes his colour come and go, makes his hands clench, and sends you from the meeting with a choking in the throat, making the dirty streets look strangely different." (1)

In fact he was more working-class in this sense than the trade union leaders themselves, calling them back from the silk hats they affected in the Commons to a more manly pride in the dignities of their own following.

He was working-class too in the quality of his thought. And this was why the "old unionists" were so bitter in opposing him. While they could ignore the Marxists and anarchists and Socialist League as middle-class aliens who would never find a following among the workers, Hardie was a menace to their influence, because he was flesh of their flesh, and stood on the same ground as they did. He had the same distrust of doctrinaire utopias as they; his generalisations, like theirs, were largely rationalisations of strategic policy; they too were empirical collectivists

as he was, (2) and, as he did, thought of their collectivism as merely a further stage from radicalism. (3) He could appreciate their viewpoint; his motivation was the same as theirs; he was upon the same course. Yet he was ahead of them, raising questions they were not yet prepared to answer. He always took up his stand a step or two beyond the limits of their compromises. For instance, the LEA did have a real measure of independent spirit, but although Hardie was prepared to accept a Liberal nomination and in fact was outwardly seeking one in 1887 and 1892, his terms were a degree more stringent than the LEA would insist upon. At Mid-Lanark, Threlfall was content with having forced the promise of a future nomination from the Liberals; Hardie was not.

The difference between Hardie and the "old unionists" was that he was the working-man intellectual. The great gift he brought to the movement was a clear, penetrating intellect. Although his writing and speeches lacked the superficial attractiveness of the schooled literary man, his genius showed in the more essential, more important gifts of

2. Hardie himself was quite aware of this: in an article describing a Miners' Federation conference he had just attended in 1890, he commented that there had been only three socialists present, "but most of the others are in reality such without knowing it. They are prepared to use the power of Parliament whenever necessary to protect the worker against the capitalist." (Labour Elector, Feb. 9, 1890).
3. "The cry is still for freedom" - Hardie: The Case for an ILP (The New Review, March, 1893, 722).

clarity and statesmanlike judgment. He could gauge to a nicety whether a policy was politically attainable, and strike to the heart of an argument with a single phrase, almost invariably making the true emphasis. (Considering the conditions under which he wrote, usually in railway carriages after a series of addresses, one marvels at the ease of his writing and the facility with which his points fall into place). Although his colleagues, and even Hardie himself, called his insight an "inner flame", inspiration that pierces through to reality as Hardie's did is in truth the working of a great mind, seeming supernatural to lesser men.

Hardie was very rarely wrong in his judgments: two notable lapses were his suggestion of an international strike for the miners' eight hours at the International Miners' Congress in 1890,⁽⁴⁾ and his confidence in a general international strike that would prevent war in 1914. It was the very depth of his intellect that gave him a statesmanlike subtlety in his analyses - an aversion to empty doctrinaire logic, an ability to take into account the irrationality of political forces and to realise just how far principle could bend to expediency without being itself destroyed. He made the right emphasis for his time, not necessarily appropriate

4. R. P. Arnot: *The Miners*, 158-9.

for any other period. It was intellectual conviction, too, that gave him his prophetic, oracular tone. He had the intellect to know that he was right and others were wrong. This tone, of course, also aroused the resentment of the "old unionist" leaders. But even more irritating, perhaps, was his insistence that they look into the future instead of merely at the present, and that they face up squarely to their central problem instead of temporising, as they knew they were doing.

Although Hardie traced the origins of his thought back to the Sermon on the Mount, equally at least they are found in the passion for liberty and independence that had once laid at the core of Radicalism and been its finest characteristic. His socialism was this sturdy sentiment that the middle-class had diverted into economic individualism translated into working-class terms. Christianity and politics were in fact mingled in Hardie's background. Significantly, side by side with the Bible and Bunyan on his parents' bookshelf stood Burns and Paine and Ingersoll. Although his parents had come to adopt free-thought as their religious philosophy and read Bradlaugh's "National Reformer", they remained tolerant enough to give full freedom to their son in his early fervour for street-corner evangelism, and he had the strength of mind to have

his own religious views. (5) He was converted at 22, (his sect was one which had broken away from the United Presbyterian Church through opposition to predestination). In Scotland, possibly in part because of a Gaelic distaste for half measures, probably even more as a result of recent experience of the crofter evictions, radicalism was more advanced than in England, extending in a great section of popular opinion as far as republicanism. Land tenure reform movements were very strong; there was little trace of the Manchester School in working-class politics. (6) On joining the "Good Templars" at 17, Hardie became the close friend (for life) of Dr. G. B. Clark, editor of the "Good Templar". Clark had been connected with the First International, was soon to be elected to Parliament for Caithness as a crofters' representative, and later became a vice-president of the Scottish Labour Party. (7)

5. G. D. H. Cole; James Keir Hardie, 7-8; W. Stewart; J. Keir Hardie, 6.

6. T. Johnston: *The History of the Working Classes in Scotland*, 206ff, 392. Although almost completed by 1850, clearances were still proceeding throughout the eighties in almost every Scottish county, and there were even "Crofters' Wars" in that decade. One effect of the advanced tone of Scottish Radicalism was to hinder the influence of the Scottish Labour Party, as the Scots were so deeply confirmed in Radicalism. Johnston also shows that nationalisation of the railways and the mines had long been discussed in Scotland.

7. Cole: *op. cit.*, 8; D. Lowe: *From Pit to Parliament*, 19.

From his early boyhood, Hardie had ample experience of the degradation of poverty. Born in August, 1856, he began irregular work at 6, and was in regular employment at 7, living in a one-room cottage with a mud floor. On one occasion, when the only wage-earner in the home - his father had been out of work for six months, and was drawing only 2/- a week from his union - he was dismissed for arriving a few minutes late at his work because of his mother's imminent confinement. With his intellectual gifts, it was only natural that he should step from his background into a burning if undefined socialism. Although an indirect contact with the London socialists - through a friend who had been won over to their teachings - may have precipitated the actual conversion, (8) he seems to have accepted the outlines of the new doctrine as soon as he heard them, as if they had long been part of his own convictions. As early as 1887 he was seeking a fundamental, socialist alteration in the economic system:

"Ours is no old-fashioned 6d.-a-day agitation. We aim at the complete emancipation of the workers from the thralldom of wagedom. Co-operative production, under state management, shall be our goal, as never till this has been obtained can we hope for better times for working people... The rights of property have become the wrongs of labour; the time has arrived for their abolition." (9)

8. Lowe, 22.

9. Stewart, 29. (Hardie's first annual report as secretary of the Scottish Miners' Federation).

Yet his socialism was his own: the details of socialist economics were of little interest to him compared with the aspect of human relationships.

Another field of experience also contributed to Hardie's entry into politics. He had begun his work in the Labour movement in the Scottish miners' unions. In 1867, at the age of ten, he entered the Lanarkshire mines, where he worked for about 13 years before being dismissed for agitation. He had received no regular schooling, but at this time he learned to read and write at evening classes - to which the pupils used to bring their own candles - and even, scratching out the characters on a blackened piece of slate at the coal face, developed speed in Pitman's shorthand. Soon becoming prominent in the union, at 23 he was elected miners' agent. (10)

After several local conflicts, a general six weeks strike of all the Lanarkshire pits broke out in 1880. As the union had no funds, it was a foolhardy gesture of which Hardie disapproved; nevertheless he gave loyal support and was one of the officials on whom Alexander Macdonald, who strongly condemned the miners for their rashness, placed the blame. After the defeat Macdonald insisted that Hardie leave the county, as a condition of his assisting the union to pay off its debt.

It was thus that Hardie accepted an invitation to become organising secretary of the Ayrshire miners, and began the task of linking up ^{the} scattered pit branches into a county union. Here again as in Lanarkshire it was an uphill, heart-breaking struggle. By August, 1881, an Ayrshire Miners' Union was formed and struck for a ten percent increase in wages. Although there had been doubts of the solidarity of the men, they came out of the pits to a man, but after ten weeks were beaten and broken. Shortly afterwards, however, the employers conceded them an increase. For the next five years, supporting his family by means of a weekly newspaper article, Hardie kept up his efforts to rebuild the county organisation. By August, 1886, the Ayrshire Miners' Union had been reformed, with Hardie himself as its secretary. The same year the Scottish Miners' Federation, of which he also became secretary, was established. In January, 1887, he issued the first number of "The Miner", then a monthly journal. (11)

Already, as is apparent from the earliest numbers of this organ, his interests were mainly political. The stress is largely upon the need for legislation and Labour representation, and very soon Hardie is clearly advocating

the formation of a Labour Party. In July, discussing the forthcoming first annual meeting of the Scottish Miners' Federation, he hopes that something will be done to initiate such a body. There is no trace in the Miner of any fear of paternalism or of the pride in industrial self-sufficiency that was so prominent in the attitudes of other Labour leaders at that time. In fact he even goes so far as to suggest "the establishment of tribunals for the settlement of all labour disputes" - a measure which would strike at the roots of all independent trades unionism. (12)

Why is this so? Partly it is because of greater optimism: Hardie never fears Parliament because of its domination by capitalists, but regards it as the potential instrument of the people. Already he is looking forward to the day when the Liberals will have disappeared and Parliament will be captured by the workers, and seems confident that his ideas will only have to be publicised to be accepted, and that victory must follow:

"I have contempt for the men who, knowing what should be done, are yet afraid to proclaim it from the housetops if need be. It is the half-heartedness of the present leaders which keeps our cause from progressing." (13)

He seems to have taken it as axiomatic that the workers could achieve much more by legislation than by other means.

12. Stewart, 39; Hughes, 22-3.

13. Hughes, 22.

Regarding the eight hour day, for instance, he writes:

"The miner finds it next to, if not quite, impossible to continue an eight hour day without legislation, and he therefore looks with confidence to Parliament to respond to his cry by voting for the Bill." (14)

But another reason for this difference in attitude from the "old" unionists -- for his lack of appreciation, in fact, of the industrial interests of unionism -- must surely have been his disheartening experience of the Scottish miners' unions, and a consciousness that they were still desperately weak. Although at the moment the Scottish Miners' Federation was 30,000 strong and on paper seemed a powerful organisation, tremendous efforts had been necessary to reach this peak and most of the county unions were soon to fall apart until the Federation membership numbered only a few thousand. Perhaps Hardie already knew that disintegration was imminent. In any case it was at this very moment when the Federation was at its strongest that he made his first venture into politics. Later at least he became clearly conscious that trade unionism and politics did not mix well, resigning his secretaryship of the Ayrshire Miners in 1891 on the ground that "The paid official of an organisation cannot very well be a pioneer." (15) Curiously, however, as early as August, 1887, he had declared: "The Labour Party

14. Hughes, 20-1, quoting the Miner, January, 1887.
 15. Lowe, 34.

will be a distinct organisation from the Trade Unions." (16)

What type of political programme did Hardie have in mind at this time? In the article in the Miner of July, 1887, in which he advocates the formation of a party he draws up a suggested platform. Most of the items are fairly typical of advanced Radicalism - for example adult suffrage, abolition of customs duties on all food imports, the abolition of non-elected authorities, and free education - but some are rather novel for this time - a graduated income tax on all incomes over £200, "Promotion of Home Colonies and the cultivation and reclamation of waste land" for the unemployed, protection of household effects to the extent of £20 from seizure for debt, a National Insurance Fund for sickness, accident, death and old age, compulsory improvement of housing and, as mentioned previously, the "establishment of tribunals for the settlement of all labour disputes." Among other items there were also payment of Members, the nationalisation of land, railways, minerals and mines, the eight hour day for miners and for workers in other industries "where found judicious", and "power to control or prohibit the liquor traffic to be vested in the inhabitants." For all the vestiges of Radicalism and the lack of a socialist general objective, the programme contains nothing that would conflict

with socialism and would in fact serve for a first instalment of socialism. Certainly several of the items would constitute a far-going interference with private property rights.

It was thus, a socialist and convinced of a pressing need for the workers to set up their own political party, that Hardie approached his entry into national politics. In August, 1887, it was proposed that he contest North Ayrshire on behalf of the Ayrshire Miners' Union. Although he wrote at the time that the unemployed and the workers "cry aloud for help. Where is it to come from? Not from the Tories, not from the Whigs, but from the Democratic Labour Party of the future",

he did not go to the poll on this occasion. (17) Then in spring of the following year came the Mid-Lanark bye-election. Although he had thus already asserted that the Liberals would never give satisfaction to the workers, he allowed his name to go forward in the Liberal list of prospective candidates. He offered to abide by the result of a test ballot to be taken among the Liberal electors, in order to determine who should receive the nomination - a suggestion which was of course refused: it is difficult in any case to imagine how this could have been fairly taken. But when

17. Hughes, 24. Earlier in the article Hardie had stated: "A Democratic Labour Party is now one of the certainties of the near future."

Liberal headquarters in London recommended the adoption of a young Welsh lawyer, Hardie withdrew his name from the nominal list, and announced that he would run independently. (18)

Why had Hardie first sought the Liberal nomination - as he was to do again later at South West Ham? In his election address he declared:

"I accept in its entirety the Liberal Programme agreed to at Nottingham (where the previous annual conference of the Party had been held) ... On questions of general policy I will vote with the Liberal Party to which I have all my life belonged." (19)

Like Shipton in his speech to the TUC of 1882, he regarded the Liberals as being traditionally the workers' party, with obligations to the workers equally as binding as the workers' duty to vote for Liberal candidates. The reason he gave for his opposition to the Party both at North Ayrshire and now at Mid Lanark was his resentment of the proposed adoption by the local Liberal Association of a candidate sent them by the caucus without even troubling to investigate his views on the Eight Hours Bill, the extension of employers' liability, and other Labour issues. He claimed that the workers had a right to the nomination. But he had known beforehand what the result would be: in fact he had already written

"Better split the party now, if there is to be a split, than at the general election, and if the Labour Party

18. Hughes, 25ff; Stewart, 39-45.

19. Stewart, 39.

only make their power felt now, time will not be wasted when the general election comes." (20)

His action in allowing his name to go forward had been only a gesture, a manoeuvre by which he would force the Liberals to demonstrate the insincerity of their professions of friendship for Labour. He cast the onus for the widening of the gap between the workers and the Liberal Party upon them.

"If Liberalism will not accept co-operation (with Labour) on fair and reasonable terms, then Liberalism must in the future reckon with our hostility",

he declared. And in one of his speeches he asserted, with a confidence that must have seemed fantastic to his hearers,

"If need be, they (the workers) would follow the example of Parnell until the day would come when Liberalism would be dead and buried in Great Britain and only the Labour Party would live." (21)

Certainly he had never intended, if elected, to be

just another Lib-Lab. M.P.!

"If the truth be told," he had declared, "the working-man representative has not hitherto been much of a success in Parliament. As a rule he is afraid to offend the proprieties by being considered extreme. He thinks more of his own reputation in the eyes of the House than of the interests of his suffering brethren in mill and mine. He desires to be reckoned a gentleman, fit to take his place as a member of the 'first club in the world'. This will never bring reform, and it is reform which is needed. Labour representatives should create opinion, both in the House and out of it, and this can only be done by activity, by violent activity. Their

20. Hughes, 25.

21. Ibid., 29, 30.

present duty is to agitate, and when they make their power felt as agitators there will be no lack of willing legislators." (22)

Hardie's agent in the resulting contest was H. H. Champion, who had previously discussed the formation of a Labour Party with him in London (although, as has been seen, Hardie had decided that this was necessary before he had first been in touch with Champion, which was at the 1887 TUC). Support came from the Highland Land League, the Glasgow Trades Council, the British Steel Smelters and the Scottish Home Rule Association, whose Secretary, James Ramsay MacDonald, wrote that Hardie's victory would "reconstruct Scottish Liberalism". The Labour Electoral Association offered £400 with the assurance of "more if needed", and Threlfall came north to take part. Although Hardie made up no specific references to socialism in his election address and speeches, he did use the term "social injustice"; and he also insisted upon the right of the workers to fair wages and better treatment than the poorhouse at the end of their lives, and argued that they could expect no help "from those who believe they can only be kept rich in proportion as you are kept poor". His programme included Home Rule for Ireland and Scotland and the whole Liberal platform, adding only land nationalisation, abolition of the House of Lords

and reduction of the expenses of the Monarchy, and a promise to "agitate for every reform likely to promote (the workers') welfare." (23)

Hardie's position in relation to the Liberals and the difference between his attitude and that of the LEA were further clarified when in the midst of the campaign Threlfall arranged for his withdrawal on what he regarded as favourable terms. When he gleefully reported this to Hardie, Hardie at first could not understand his meaning. Then, as Hardie wrote later: "I remember rising to my feet and Threlfall ceased speaking. Next morning he returned home to Southport." Hardie was induced, however, to meet Sir George Trevelyan, the Liberal Party representative from London, who offered him a seat at the next general election with expenses paid, and a salary of £300

"... as they were doing for others (he gave me names). I explained as well as I could why his proposal was offensive, and though he was obviously surprised, he was too much of a gentleman to be anything but courteous. And so the fight went on." (24)

Trevelyan and Threlfall might well be surprised.

From the LEA viewpoint the offer was a victory. Labour had made its demonstration and forced the unwilling concession of a seat; on the other hand, there was no chance of success in the present contest. (Care would be needed, of course, to

23. Hughes, 25ff; Stewart, 39-45.

24. Hughes, 27.

ensure that the candidature eventually offered would be one with a reasonable chance of winning the seat.) Hardie's obstinacy seemed capricious. The explanation, of course, was that whereas the LEA policy was to bargain for as much as could be obtained without unseating Liberal candidates and enabling the return of Tories, for Hardie, if the Liberals would not concede without qualification whatever Labour demanded, there was no alternative to setting up a completely separate Labour Party, whatever the immediate disadvantages that might result. It was Labour that must dictate terms. He was certainly not going to become a paid servant of the Liberals. He looked further ahead than the Liberal-Labour men; but he was also much more certain that a breach with the Liberals would have to come, and was quite confident at the prospect.

The election was bitterly fought. As the LEA had withdrawn its offer of money when Hardie had refused to stand down, the campaign was financed by £300 provided by the socialist writer, Miss Florence Harkness; the miners apparently contributed nothing. Since two-thirds of the Lanark miners were Irish, an instruction from the United Irish League to vote for the Liberal was a serious blow. The voting was 3,847 for the Liberal, 2,917 for the Tory and 617 for Hardie (25)

25. Ibid., 31. Miss Harkness wrote under the name of "John Law".

A few months later, as the result of the election, the Scottish Labour Party was formed. Hardie was its secretary; R. B. Cunningham-Graham, who had been an associate of Hardie's for about a year, was president; Dr. G. B. Clark a vice-president; and J. Shaw Maxwell, another land reformer, who had contested an election for the Land Restoration League in 1885 against a Liberal, and was later to be active in the "new" union movement in London and first secretary of the ILP, was Chairman of the Executive. (Champion and Michael Davitt sent their apologies to the inaugural meeting.) (26)

The programme of the Party was very similar to Hardie's suggested platform of July, 1887, but also included State banking. It was not quite socialist: an attempt was made to have the ultimate objective stated as the "nationalisation of all the capital used in production," but it was decided instead to include this in a general statement of objects to be drawn up by the executive. The executive seem, however, to have shelved the issue. (27)

One of the points on which Hardie, who was obviously the inspiration of the new body, took up a different attitude from the LEA was his rejection of the crude precaution that all candidates or officials of the Party be working men. He had clashed with the LEA

26. D. Lowe: Souvenirs of Scottish Labour, 2ff.
27. Hughes, 49.

leaders on this point at its 1887 conference. In fact he now declared that any parliamentary candidate who was not in favour of the Eight Hours Bill or of the provision of relief work for the unemployed was less entitled to be regarded as a Labour representative than any man - "peasant or peer" - who was ready to support the programme of his Party. (28)

The SLP was active from the moment of its formation, Hardie and Cunningham-Graham especially addressing many meetings throughout Scotland, but does not seem to have gained much strength until 1891. Certainly it could not have won a national reputation: in July, 1890, the editor of the People's Press in London apparently knew nothing of it, referring in his July 19 issue to "the Scottish Labour Party, whatever that may be." (Cunningham-Graham was on the board of the People's Press at the time, and a few weeks later, Shaw Maxwell became the editor!) At one meeting he attended Low had the impression that the audience of miners applauded Hardie for his patent sincerity, but were not converted to the independent Labour policy. (29) In the SLP annual report for 1892 Hardie was exultant over the progress made in the previous year, when they had held crowded meetings in the main halls of the Scottish centres - his tone suggesting that they had been much less successful in earlier years.

28. Hamilton Fyfe: Keir Hardie, 48; Hughes, 49.

29. Lowe: Souvenirs, 35.

(Curiously, the income for 1892 was no less than £1,408). (30) There was no branch in Dundee until February, 1892; none in Edinburgh until in January, 1893, four branches of the new ILP were formed in quick succession. In Aberdeen, where the Labour political organisation generally kept to the title of LEA, the situation was rather confused. It was in 1892-3 that Champion was making Aberdeen his headquarters. The local Socialist Society was split at the time, but the SLP was supporting Champion in his Aberdeen campaign for the 1892 general election as late as March of that year; it was shortly afterwards, however, that the breach occurred between him and Hardie. (31)

A few months previously to this, there had been other quarrels within the Party. In the last weeks of 1891 there was a dispute with Henry Tait, Secretary of the Scottish Railway Servants, whom the SLP had elected at a cost of some £50 to the Glasgow City Council. Once elected, Tait refused to vote according to the Party's instructions. (32) And in early 1892, on the ground - or so it was reported - that, although he favoured the eight hours bill and reform - but not abolition - of the House of Lords, he declined to express

30. Ibid., 114.

31. Ibid., 148; Workman's Times, Mar. 12, 1892.

32. Workman's Times, Jan. 16, 1892.

general hostility to the capitalist class, the Party refused to support H. Chisholm Robertson as a candidate, although he was Secretary of the Glasgow Trades Council, which was affiliated to the SLP. As a result Robertson then attempted to set up a "Scottish Trade Union Labour Party" in opposition to the SLP, with a very similar but slightly more moderate programme. Later he became one of Champion's lieutenants. (33)

By 1893, by which time several of its original honorary officials had become prominent among the Liberals (Dr. Clark, who had been a Liberal M.P. from the beginning, had remained a Party man), there were 23 SLP branches in Scotland, the northernmost being at Dundee. Several trades councils and union branches were also affiliated. At the conference of that year Hardie attempted unsuccessfully to amend the constitution to prohibit members from belonging to any other political party: apparently the SLP had not yet reached this degree of independence. (34) And at the fifth conference, in January, 1894, an attempt to obtain the adoption of a definite socialist objective was rejected 104-57 in favour of the

33. Ibid., Feb. 20, Mar. 19, 1892; Trade Unionist, Nov. 14, 1892. Yet Hardie reported at the 1891 SLP (held in January) conference that the SLP was "working cordially with the newly formed United Trades Councils Labour Party" - was this yet another body? From a second reference on a later page of the Workman's Times of Mar. 19, it appears that it was. (Lowe; Souvenirs, 83).
34. Lowe; Souvenirs, 112.

"return ... of ... representatives who will act irrespective of the convenience of any political party in securing justice to Labour and the establishment of a just social order,"

Hardie supporting this wider definition on the ground that they should not exclude those who could not accept the nominal socialist position. (35) Delegates were present from 23 SLP branches, 5 trades councils, 40 trade union branches (only one being a union of unskilled workers), 5 co-operative societies, 4 land reform organisations and 7 other societies, including the Scottish Socialist Federation, which was a union of the previous SDF and Socialist League Scottish branches, and a Ruskin Society. (36) In December of that same year a final conference was held, 32 SLP branches now being in existence, at which on Hardie's motion it was resolved to disband and merge into the ILP. (37)

In the present state of our knowledge of the SLP, it is difficult to evaluate its significance. The Scottish Labour movement always seemed to be prolific in producing advanced political leaders, but backward industrially, and weak in its rank and file. Certainly the consolidation of the ILP in England in 1893 was an event of much greater moment.

35. Lowe, 154.

36. Ibid., 160-1. Chisholm Robertson was back in the SLP by this time.

37. Ibid., 170.

As was seen in the previous section of this chapter, before the Scottish Labour Party had long come into existence there had also appeared in many parts of England a large number of similar bodies which were equally, or even to a greater degree, precursors of the ILP. The next important development both in their evolution and in Hardie's was the general election of 1892. Although they had reached the stage when they would have come together to form a national organisation even without this event, the results of the election gave the movement an important stimulus and also greatly helped to establish Hardie as the leader.

And this was in spite of an apparent eleventh-hour repentance by the Liberals. Realising at last, it seemed, that the workers were on the point of breaking their traditional allegiance, or perhaps retreating in dismay before the Fabian barrage of facts and figures, the Liberal Party pre-election conference adopted the "Newcastle Programme" - a platform drawn up for them by Sidney Webb and his study group. As a section at least of the unionists seem to have accepted this gesture as a sign that there were still gains to be won from the Liberals, to a certain extent it helped to postpone the day of independence. The issue of whether the breach should be made could be more easily put off: since a large body of

unionists continued to doubt the expedience of independence for some years yet, this ground for further hope was probably of some importance at this time. (38)

On the other hand, the independent policy seemed to win some spectacular success at the election with the victories of Hardie, John Burns and J. Havelock Wilson, and the large vote cast for Millett. Apparently it could no longer be dismissed as hopelessly impracticable; there can be little doubt that this demonstration also influenced a considerable body of the workers. And this is despite the fact that the appearance of these successes was hardly true to the reality.

Burns, for instance, had not been opposed by the Liberals. Although he had virtually forced himself upon the Battersea Liberal Association through the large popular following he had obtained and in so doing had not compromised his claim to be a genuinely independent Labour candidate, he had also now been a member of the London County Council for three years and, as a member of the Progressives, had accommodated himself without difficulty to its tone, so that the Liberals had every reason to believe they had little to fear from him in the House. Although the Liberal Association

38. See particularly Letter from a trade unionist to the Webbs in the Webb Collection, A IV, 58ff.

had made several attempts to find another candidate - all who were approached had preferred the prospects in other electorates - the Liberals may well have believed that Burns would be more of an asset than an embarrassment to the Party. Certainly he was soon to show that he did not interpret the term "independent" in Hardie's sense. (39) As for Havelock Wilson, his seat had certainly been won in opposition to the official Liberal in a bitter three-cornered struggle. Yet this was quite in the Liberal-Labour tradition: Wilson himself was not a socialist, but a good Liberal, who had believed, seemingly with some justice, that he had a better claim to the nomination than the official candidate. As has been seen, the line of demarcation between the old Liberal-Labour attitude and the new independent policy was not a clearly defined one. When he reached the House, Wilson was soon to show that he did not stand on the ILP side. (40)

Hardie for his part had taken up the same position as at Mid-Lanark. He declared his adherence to the general Liberal programme, giving particular stress to his support of Home Rule, and denounced the Conservative policy at home and abroad. Nevertheless, although he offered himself to the South West Han Liberal Association and his supporters did

39. J. Burgess: John Burns, 225.

40. J. H. Wilson: My Stormy Voyage Through Life, 246ff, 256-60.

their utmost to obtain his adoption as the official Liberal candidate, this was largely in order to place the onus of rejecting him upon the Liberals. (His supporters went so far, in fact, as to forge admission tickets to the Liberal adoption meeting; but as the fraud was detected before all had gained entry, they did not achieve their object). (41)

"If the Liberal Party is prepared to accept our principles," he stated, "we are prepared to work with them. If they are not prepared to accept our principles, the Liberals are no more our friends than the Tories." But again, this was only a gesture. He expected rejection beforehand:

"They were told that what they had to vote for was Liberalism and Liberal principles. They wanted, however, a definition of what that meant. If it simply meant what John Morley and other philosophic Radicals meant, he would not agree with them... They wanted an Independent Labour Party to hold the balance of power in the House. Neither the Liberals nor the Tories were at present going to help them, but they were going to compel them to do so by a Labour Party." (42)

When his nomination had been rejected by the Association, the contest became a three-cornered one. Some months before the poll, however, the Liberal candidate died. Its efforts to replace him meeting with no success, the Association

41. Workman's Times, Feb. 27, 1892: see also People's Press, May 10, 1890. Hardie was supported by the Radical Association in the electorate, but not the Liberal Association.

42. Hughes: Keir Hardie, 54.

decided to give tacit but unofficial support to Hardie. (As Hardie expressed it - in a phrase commonly used in this sense at the time:- "He had been informed that the Liberals did not intend to interfere in that constituency." (43) The inference was that, as the Liberals were the workers' Party, the step of bringing in a third candidate when the workers wished to run a man of their own constituted "interference": curiously, such "interference" was always strongly resented). Although it was stated that many Liberals would not follow this direction, and voted instead for the Tory, Hardie's victory, by 5,268 to 4,036, was thus achieved largely with Liberal support. (44)

Thus in each of the three cases the victory of the Labour candidate was much less an endorsement of the independent policy than it seemed. And in Scotland, now that Cunninghame-Graham had revealed his true colours to the electors, the Liberals withdrew their support from him and he was badly defeated.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid., 57; Stewart, 69-70. In his biography of Blatchford, Laurence Thompson states (p. 93) that during the election Hardie's treasurer at West Ham, Dr. John Moir, came up to Salford to speak for the Liberal who was opposing W. K. Hall, an independent Labour candidate who was receiving half his financial support from the Clarion. This seems curious, as Moir appears to have had the reputation of being very sympathetic to Labour candidates.

Nevertheless, it was for the moment the appearance more than the reality which had its effect upon the course of the independent political movement. It was on January 13 and 14, 1893, that there met at Bradford the Conference at which the Independent Labour Party was to be formed as a national organisation. The decision to summon this conference had been made during the 1892 TUC in the previous September, just after the election, by a group of delegates called together by Hardie. Of the 115 delegates who gathered in January, 22 were from Bradford, 13 from London, 9 from the Scottish Labour Party, 6 from the SDF, and 12 from the Fabian Society and its provincial branches. Manchester, Huddersfield and Leeds had contributed a total of 26 delegates; and there were 3 from Trades Councils, 2 from the Koomsbury Socialists, and 2 representing trade unions. As this leaves only about 20 delegates to be accounted for, mostly from the Midlands, it can be seen that the Conference represented only part of the country, but it was the industrial part.⁽⁴⁵⁾ In fact the new Party, as was apparent from its membership, did have its roots in the industrial working class. Significantly, although the provincial branches of the Fabian Society were admitted without question, it was first decided to exclude the two delegates - Shaw and Pease - from the parent body:

45. Official report, cover.

apparently the Conference felt that the London Fabians did not belong to the new movement. Aveling's credentials were also questioned, but he was admitted and eventually elected to the Executive, while Shaw kept up a barrage of interjections from the gallery until the Conference took him into its midst - according to one authority, in sheer self-defence. (46) (Neither Burns nor J. H. Wilson were present).

Although the programme adopted by the new body followed the same general lines as Hardie and other Labour candidates had been advocating, and was little more than radical, the delegates followed Hardie's lead in adopting a socialist objective. By no fewer than 91-16 it was agreed that the general aim of the Party should be the "collective ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange." (47) Since this decision represents a clear advance from the attitude to socialism revealed by the correspondents of the Workman's Times, it is probably a measure of Hardie's and Blatchford's influence. It was also an advance from the position adopted by the Scottish Labour Party: evidently the ILP was meant from the first to be a "ginger group" within the Labour movement. Yet, as was shown by the secession of the SDF within a few months, ILP socialism was

46. Ibid., 1-2.

47. Report, 4.

not Marxism. Although it is difficult to imagine Hyndman ever surrendering the reins to Hardie, there was more than a personal difference between the two leaders. To the SDF the ILP was always to be only "a half-way house to Socialism". Despite the choice of objective, the Conference was almost unanimous in keeping the word "socialist" out of the Party's title. (48)

Thus the Independent Labour Party was now established as a national organisation; and this fact in itself must have given a marked stimulus to the further spread of the movement in the following few years. Meanwhile new impetus had also been contributed through Hardie's accession to the Commons, from the opportunity it gave him to demonstrate just what he meant by Labour representation. He could now lay bare so that none could doubt his meaning the ambiguity of the Liberal-Labour position. And he made the very most of his stage. Although his entry to the House from a charabanc escort to the strains of a cornet and in a workman's cap was not premeditated - he had not known of the workers' plan to take him in procession, and had especially bought a felt hat for the occasion which he was unable to find when the moment came - his working-class clothing contrasted very effectively with the Lib-Lab. affectation of the dress and

manners of their "betters". And once the incident had occurred, he naturally refused to "be coerced into donning what was evidently looked upon as more respectable headgear". If there was a touch of showmanship in all this, it was good showmanship, and in the circumstances Hardie could take no other course: it was not he who had made clothes the symbol of class." (49)

Moreover, Hardie's skill in questioning brought out the class-bias of Cabinet Ministers as no amount of pamphleteering could ever have done. In the words of Bernard Shaw:

"When Keir Hardie rose to ask questions, there was only one thing for the Front Bench to do, and that was to lie - lie impudently, snobbishly, spitefully, Pecksniffianly, Tartuffily..." (50)

His shafts struck home: when on June 28, 1894, he opposed the congratulatory resolution to the Queen on the birth of a son to the Duchess of York, on the ground that there had

49. Nevertheless, it seems that many of the workers disapproved of Hardie's attitude. At a meeting held during the 1894 TUC, Threlfall was reported as follows: "I declare to you that he (Hardie) has shocked the sentiments of Labour (loud applause) He has made, I believe, a grave error to his reputation (loud applause) in going to the House of Commons dressed as he has." Threlfall had announced just previously that, if ever elected, he himself would go to the Commons "dressed as a gentleman", and also asserted that those who had come to the TUC "clad as gentlemen" were giving "good examples to the working classes" that were "of the greatest importance". (Rene Lavoille: Les Classes Ouvrières en Europe III, 495-6).

50. Quoted by H. Fyfe: Keir Hardie, 67.

been no vote of condolence to the relatives of more than 200 miners recently killed in a Welsh mining disaster, he received over a thousand letters the following day, the majority approving his stand. (51) The very venom of the press, which sought every opportunity to discredit him - for instance a rebuke by the Speaker to a Member walking at his side who had forgotten to remove his hat became in some newspapers a scene of disorder in which Hardie deliberately defied the Parliamentary conventions (52) - helped to make him a national figure.

When the second conference of the ILP met in January, 1894, Hardie claimed in his opening address that there were now nearly 400 branches. Practically all of the Fabian Society's 70 branches had come over. Yet the amount received in affiliation fees was only £56, which at threepence a head represented only some 4,500 financial members. (This paltry amount of income contrasts strangely with the £1,400 that the Scottish Labour Party had received in 1891-2: although the SLP funds were probably much more centralised - the ILP regarded itself as a federation - even allowance for this factor does not seem nearly to account for the difference.) (53) And in the following year, despite an official claim to

51. Lowe: From Pit to Parliament, 54.

52. Hughes, 59.

53. 1894 ILP Conference Report, 4.

35,000 "paying members", the affiliation fees amounted only to £134, which represented 10,720. (54) Certainly it must have been true, as was explained at the time, that many branches paid the fees for only a part of their membership, and the Party was apparently decentralised to a marked degree, the Bradford members for instance paying a total subscription of 5/- annually into their branch funds. Nevertheless there does seem to be discrepancy between these figures and the membership claimed, and certainly the Council were seriously limited in their operations for want of money. In 1895, despite strong protests, the affiliation dues were raised from threepence to a shilling. (55) At the 1896 Conference the Party claimed to have more than 20,000 members, but it was explained that affiliation fees had been paid for only 6,301, some branches objecting to the increased rate and many being impoverished as a result of the 1895 general election. (56)

It was, of course, at this 1895 general election that the first real measure of the Party's strength was taken. No fewer than 29 candidates were brought forward, and not one was successful. This result was certainly most

54. 1895 Report, 5.

55. Ibid., 24-5.

56. 1896 Report, 11.

disappointing. It cost the Party a great deal of prestige -- a most valuable asset to any political party -- and brought upon it many charges of futility. This was the main note in the furious attack upon the ILP delivered by the President of the 1895 TUC in his opening address, in which he pointed particularly to the fact that the Party had obtained only one-seventh of the votes cast in the electorate it had contested. At the following ILP Conference, however, the tone was not one of disappointment, and although one always expects optimism to be the note of political parties, there was in fact much to be placed on the credit side. With some justification it was argued that the total of 45,000 votes received -- an average of 1592 for each candidate -- was no mean achievement for a beginning. In his address to the Conference Hardie gloried in the fact that in many cases the support given to the ILP man had apparently been enough to greatly assist in the defeat of the Liberal: (57) they had made themselves a force to be reckoned with in national politics. Although his own defeat had been a serious blow, it had in fact been, despite the loss of Liberal and a good deal of Irish support, by only 4,750 to 3,975 in a straight contest, and this amidst a general swing towards the Tories.

During the Conference it was stated that the number of branches was now 381: it was claimed, because of the fact

that some of the previous 400-odd branches had been consolidated, that this actually represented a gain during the year of 77 branches. (58) In the Labour Annual for 1895 272 of these are listed, of which 68 were in Lancashire, 40 in Yorkshire, 35 in London and 50 in Scotland. Cheshire had 17 and Durham 9, leaving 88 for the whole of the rest of the kingdom. (Four branches are listed for Ireland, and only one for Wales.) (59) But since this grouping corresponds rather closely with the distribution of trade unionists, especially if the miners, who everywhere but in Scotland tended to keep apart from the rest of the Labour movement, are excluded, it tends apparently to show that the ILP was less a regional growth than an expression of the working class. (The distribution of unionists, of course, exaggerates the concentration of general population.)

In the following years the strength of the ILP seems to have declined. It is impossible to obtain definite figures for membership or number of branches - in fact it seems ominous that they are concealed. Whatever value these amounts possess as an indication, the affiliation fees fell from £431 for 1896 and £449 for 1897 to £354 in 1898 and £304 in 1899. (60) The first flush of enthusiasm had passed

58. 1896 Report, 10.

59. Labour Annual, 1895, 48-59, 214-219.

60. 1897 Conference Report, 6; 1898, 2; 1899, 6; 1900, 14.

without being sustained by spectacular tangible results - the Labour Churches also died away in this period when they were no longer a novelty. The 1895 election results must have discouraged many. There were explanations that the very intensity of the work had drained the life from many branches; there was also, very probably, a natural slackening of interest when there was no election imminent. The inability of the two socialist bodies to work together may well have alienated a number of adherents. Another undoubted factor was the counter-current of rising imperialist sentiment in the years before the Boer War.

The result was not only a decline in numerical strength, but also, as is seen particularly in the report of the 1899 Conference, considerable discontent within the Party. Some delegates complained that the "ILP News" - a newsletter keeping the branches in touch with each other - represented only the views of a clique. Several nominations were received in opposition to Hardie for the office of chairman, and towards the end of the Conference it was agreed to limit the tenure of the office to three years at a time.⁽⁶¹⁾ Faith in Hardie's leadership was beginning to wane. It was also at this period, as noticed elsewhere, that suggestions were made that the Party relax its policy of strict independence

61. 1899 Conference Report, 30, 34, 48.

in order to win over some friendly Radicals, and that feeling in favour of alliance with the SDF appeared to reach its height. Thus the very basis of the ILP seemed in danger of crumbling.

Curiously, this recession was not shared by the SDF. In fact in 1898 21 new SDF branches were formed, bringing the total to 137; and in 1899 a further gain of about 20 branches was made. Although the Federation had shared in the benefits of the general expansion of interest in Labour matters in the early nineties, so that its revenue of £579 for 1893-4 represented a comparatively prosperous year, the figure for 1897-8 was nearly treble this amount - £1,554 - and for 1898-9 £1,640. (62)

Despite this falling-off in the ILP strength, the Party had made steady progress in winning representation on local bodies. By 1898, when a total of 70 people, men and women, attended a "Conference of Elected Persons" held in co-operation with the Fabian Society, several score of ILP members had won seats on local authorities. (63) There can be little doubt, however, that the main interests of the Party were centred in Parliament, so that these lesser successes seem to have provided little compensation for the failure to achieve victories in the national field.

62. Labour Annual, 1899, 76; 1900, 86.

63. Ibid., 1899, 15-6; 1900, 63.

There is a further curious feature of the decline in the strength and morale of the Party: although almost every trade union began to discuss parliamentary representation following the defeat of the ASE in their 1897 lock-out, (which was, as will be seen, an important turning point in the political movement) this change in the current of opinion seems to have had no effect upon the ILP. Certainly the unions looked at first rather to a general trade union federation for the answer to their problem; but even in 1899, when they had turned to the political field, this movement of opinion does not seem to have been reflected within the Party. It is difficult to suggest a complete explanation for this. When they stressed the need for representation in Parliament, the union leaders - to an extraordinary extent - had representation of their own particular trade in mind, and not Labour representation generally, and made little or no reference to the ILP. Nevertheless, if the Boot and Shoe Operatives are a typical example, the unions did co-operate with the local ILP branches in the electorate they chose to contest. One difficulty was that there was as yet no machinery for co-operation between the ILP and the TUC. And this was probably due in part to ILP reluctance to lose its identity

as a party by surrendering control of its policy to the TUC. The Labour Representation Committee was, of course, a solution of this difficulty and was to signalise the alliance of the ILP and the trade unions.

The problem, however, was not altogether one of constitution-building. Although closest of all the socialist societies to the working-class movement, the ILP could never be completely representative of trade unionism. It represented a close union of some middle-class sympathisers - who had little influence in policy making, however, because of the force of Hardie's intellect - with the political section of the working-class - an elite who were inherently politicians, instinctively eager to translate the aspirations of their class into political theory and action. And in this they reflected the social, economic and intellectual forces of their age. But the bulk of the workers and unionists, although these same forces had raised their ambitions, still gave more of their attention to issues that were more tangible and seemed more immediate.

As the ILP passed further from its first propagandist phase, the influence of the Clarion group upon its policies diminished; and this will be a convenient point therefore at which to round off the account of its contribution to the

independent Labour political movement. Certainly the Clarion had a large following for many years, particularly in the Manchester branches, but when Hardie disagreed with its counsel he generally had his way. For instance one of Blatchford's points of strategy - the famous "Fourth Clause", which was a provision that ILP members should not vote for either of the candidates of the two traditional parties when there was no ILP man taking part in a contest - was brought forward on several occasions at ILP conferences, but was always rejected, with the sole exception that it was carried 105-10 at a special conference held just before the 1895 election.⁽⁶⁴⁾ It was of course totally unrealistic, and Hardie opposed it for this reason. The members could not be expected to conform to it; and it appears that they did not.

On the other hand, despite this attempt of the Clarion group to carry a policy which they claimed was more independent than Hardie's, it was also the Clarion, together with Tom Mann and the SDF - of all people! - who from about 1898 were pressing a suggestion that the ILP should shift its position slightly so as to win the support of the more advanced Radicals. A result of despair at the slow rate of progress, this proposal was widely discussed at this time.⁽⁶⁵⁾ The gap

64. 1896 Conference Report, 14.

65. See especially Labour Annual, 1899, 40; H. Fyfe: Keir Hardie, 58.

seemed so small; so little success had been won - just a slight relaxation of their rigid exclusiveness would, it was argued, bring some good friends to their side. But Hardie would have none of it. The gap was not as small as it seemed: the test of sympathy to be applied to well-wishers could only be their willingness to sever themselves from the Liberals and align with the ILP. The very *raison d'être* of the ILP was the impossibility of working with Liberalism: those who were not for them must therefore be against them. Thompson, who was probably the main author of this suggestion, could never feel at ease with Hardie, whom he thought humourless and obstinate. (66) Yet Hardie's whole genius was for compromise, so long as the principle of independence was not destroyed. Attempting to be more "independent" than Hardie at one moment and less "independent" the next, Thompson and Blatchford had no real appreciation of the ILP's basis. Thus, inevitably, they lost influence.

Similarly Thompson showed his opportunism in 1898 by conducting a campaign in the *Clarion* for the alliance of all socialist bodies - which meant virtually, of course, the ILP and the SDF. (67) Again he acted through dissatisfaction with the rate of progress, and again he demonstrated the *Clarion's* lack of understanding of the ILP principle. No

66. A. M. Thompson: *Here I Lie*, 98.

67. *The Clarion*, October and November, 1898.

other position but the one the Party was occupying was possible: the lack of immediate success was irrelevant. Confident of his analysis, Hardie was prepared to wait a lifetime in the knowledge that victory would come in the end. In any case no real progress could be made on any other lines.

The truth was that the Clarion group were not close enough to the working class. Blatchford, who wanted first to convert the workers to carpetless floors and Greek literature, was a sentimentalist living in an ivory tower. His lack of interest in politics - he did not know that the 1906 election was in progress until after it was over, and made no mention of it in his editorials (68) - was not due merely to his personal inability as a public speaker and his distaste for the compromise that was a necessary part of political activity. It arose primarily from the fact that he did not see the importance of issues that were vital to Hardie and working-men politicians. He did not see, for instance, that the new party had to be a party of the workers themselves: that to the workers independence was worth a great deal for its own sake. He showed little comprehension of industrial questions. Although he made a special journey to

68. A. M. Thompson, 127-8; L. Thompson: Robert Blatchford, 179. The only election Blatchford ever voted in was in 1924, when he supported Baldwin against the Labour Government. By this time he had become a convert to Henry Ford's philosophy. (L. Thompson, 229-31).

Bradford to investigate the Manningham Strike, he came away quite unable to understand what was involved. (69) Similarly, the famous "Clarion scheme" of 1897 for a general federation of unions revealed a lack of appreciation of trade unionism. Although it won many rank-and-file adherents through its ingenuity and the sheer force of Clarion publicity, it was much too unrealistic on the essential point of the possible obligations of component unions. If true, Blatchford's reported statement of 1894 -- "Another twenty years of prosperous trade and cheap bread and we are done for" (70) -- is a sad measure of his limited insight. Good fellowship and Cinderella parties were not enough. The interest of the Clarion group in the movement was primarily aesthetic and intellectualist: their appeal was timely, and a great force in creating the Party, but inadequate to sustain it.

The Clarion group could not keep in touch with the course of the movement because their origins were not in the working class. Although they had known poverty, the Blatchfords were classless -- sons of theatrical parents. Thompson's father was a stockbroker, and most of his time on the Clarion he was writing highly successful light opera.

Ray was rather too fond of good eating. Although setting-up

69. L. Thompson, 72.

70. Marching On (Labour Party pamphlet), 1950.

the Clarion did mean the sacrifice of good incomes, and Blatchford refused an offer of £1,500 a year on one occasion when the paper's fortunes were at their lowest, even when there were no profits and they were rejoicing in their poverty, the Clarion four were each drawing £4 a week from the partnership, which was hardly the same as the poverty of the workers. (71) They brought sincerity and sympathy to the cause as well as great ability, but not always complete understanding.

Before we can pass to consider the formation of the Labour Representation Committee, the next landmark in the development of the political Labour movement, it will be advisable to glance at another important event in ILP history: the accession of an outstanding recruit in the person of James

Ramsay MacDonald. Although his influence was to be more noticeable later, MacDonald's entry to the Party meant a notable gain in intellectual and directive power. Passing his boyhood in the little Scottish fishing village of Lossiemouth in Morayshire, MacDonald was another who had known poverty, though hardly the cruelly unmeaning poverty of the unemployed wage-worker, for he had been a natural son, and was reared by his mother and grandmother, dependant largely on his mother's earnings. (72)

71. L. Thompson, 83.

72. G. (Lord) Elton: The Life of James Ramsay MacDonald, 16ff.

Receiving the common solid Scottish schooling, he had early shown a gifted intellect and a sensitive imagination. He was ambitious with an ambition that extended beyond a mere desire to obtain wealth. A school teacher for a year or two, including a period which he spent in Bristol, he had come to London in 1886 to begin as a poor clerk, imposing further poverty upon himself to further his studies, lunching on a sandwich and a glass of water. On the one hand his interest was in geology, on the other in social theory. Although, when still a youth in Lossiemouth, he had publicly expressed socialist views and in 1885, during his period in that town, had been prominent in the Bristol Socialist Society, the movement does not seem to have become a passion with him. He gives one rather the impression of being the intellectual dilettante, toying with Socialism as one of a number of attractive social theories. In 1887, for instance, in addition to joining both the London Fabians and SDF, he was secretary of the Scottish Home Rule Association, and in the nineties he became prominent in the "Fellowship of the New Life" from which the Fabian Society had originated, being actually one of a group of its members who for a time lived together in a St. John's Wood house, attempting to demonstrate the New Life in microcosm. In 1892-3 he was secretary of

the Fellowship. And despite his early championing of socialism, he remained with the Liberals for a long period. He learned the practical side of politics as secretary from 1888 to a Liberal M.P. (73) It was at length in 1894, following an experience with the Liberal Party similar to Hardie's - the Liberals twice refused to accept him as a workers' candidate - that he wrote to Hardie asking for admission to the ILP. In his letter he stated that he had always been working for the same objective as Hardie in politics, but until this time had believed it could be attained through the Liberals. (74)

But if at times he seemed only a dabbler in the Labour movement, MacDonald's dabbling was most effective. Dissatisfied with Marxism for much the same reasons as Hardie, he had formulated a historical theory of socialism of his own on biological lines that was basically similar to Hardie's interpretation. (75) Although it lacked Hardie's class bitterness, it painted a similar picture of a new world - a renewal of the organically constituted society of the centuries before Liberal economic anarchy - where the workers would be a living part of the community instead of a passive strata whose self-expression was subordinated to the rest.

73. Ibid., 39-68.

74. W. Stewart: J. Keir Hardie, 95-6.

75. J. R. MacDonald: Socialism and Society.

Similarly to Hardie's doctrines, it involved the whole of life. (In his preface to Robert Smillie's "My Life for Labour" in 1924, MacDonald described contests over economic interests as "market-place brawls" which socialism transcended -- an example of his tendency to relegate economics rather too far into the background.) If, like Fabianism, this theory stressed the gradualness and inevitability of development, and was quite as intellectual as Fabianism, it had much more feeling about it, and much more emphasis on social justice. MacDonald's sensitivity -- his impressionability, that was later to become a fault -- did give him insight into the working-class point of view: even if they could not always follow his argument, his socialism had an appeal to the workers. If not quite his whole heart, he did bring feeling to the movement. Nor had he yet developed his later overwordiness, and they were moved by his attractive, expressive phrases.

Moreover, despite a tendency to move over a shade too far towards a compromise, -- he warned Andrew Fisher, the Australian Labour premier, in 1907, that Hardie was rather an extremist⁽⁷⁶⁾ -- he shared Hardie's gift for gauging how much could be conceded to expediency without sacrificing principle, and thus made a consummate tactician.

He and Hardie worked rather well together, on common ground yet supplementing each others' gifts.

CHAPTER 13.

FILLING THE RELIGIOUS VOID.
THE MOVEMENT AS A RELIGIOUS PHENOMENON:

The movement for the political self-expression of Labour was partly a religious phenomenon. This is one of the main reasons for its immense, irrational enthusiasm and an important explanation of its origins. As one of the movement's most sober and yet most successful propagandists later testified:

"In estimating the meaning of the rise and growth of the Socialist movement in England, it is necessary to remember that the driving force behind the attack on capitalism was not primarily political ambition, nor economic distress, but moral indignation..... (The Socialists were) willing servants of a moral idealism which aroused in them a devotion and a passion for service, such as had previously been associated only with purely religious movements..... The young Socialist advocates were not political adventurers; they were preachers filled with the Holy Ghost."(1)

During the weeks in the mid-eighties when she was living with a family of weavers at Bacup, Lancashire, Beatrice Webb became conscious of a deep change that was taking place in the life of these workers.

".....Though religious feeling still has an immense hold on this class," she wrote to her father, "and forms a real basis for many lives, the most religious of them agree that the younger generation are looking elsewhere for subjects of thought and feeling. There is an immense amount of spare energy in this class, now that it is educated, which is by no means used up in their mechanical occupation. When the religious channel is used up it must go somewhere."(2)

-
1. Lord Snell: Men, Movements and Myself, 99.
 2. My Apprenticeship, 161-2.

Reflecting on this discovery a few months later, she recorded in her diary:

"In living among the mill-hands of East Lancashire, I was impressed with the depth and realism of their religious faith. It seemed to absorb the entire nature, to claim as its own all the energy unused in the actual struggle for existence..... It would seem to me, from my slight experience of Bacup and Birmingham, that that part of the Englishman's nature which has found gratification in religion is now drifting into political life. When I suggested this to Mr. Chamberlain he answered, 'I quite agree with you, and I rejoice in it. I have always had a grudge against religion for absorbing the passion in man's nature.'" (3)

Three years later, she was interested to observe a further stage in this development:

"Bacup life is still religious - the book of science, insinuating itself into the mill-hand's cottage, has not yet ousted the 'book of life'. The young man goes to chapel, but he will not teach in the Bible Class or the Sunday School. The books from the free 'Co-op' library interest him more; his talk about God is no longer inspired by the spirit of self-devoting faith." (4)

And on another visit, in 1889, she thought she could still sense this change taking place:

".....they need more than intellectualisms - something to bind them together as a community as religion had done, and give warmth and meaning to their individual lives." (5)

And again, in another passage:

"I realised the permeating influence, and wondered what would fill the void it would leave, what inspiring motive would take its place?" (6)

Beatrice Webb's intuition was sound: one of the main

-
- 3. Ibid., 164.
 - 4. Ibid., 170.
 - 5. Ibid., 171.
 - 6. Ibid.

functions of the movement that was creating the Labour Party was to fill the void that the decay of religious faith had left. The pattern of religious beliefs giving meaning to the mid-Victorian working-class way of life was disintegrating with the spread of education and the growing prestige of science. Some more-or-less coherent system of philosophy was necessary to replace it: to a very considerable extent the new development in the Labour movement met the need. And from this aspect - and using the term "religious" in the broad sense of the system of philosophy necessary to give meaning to the whole pattern of daily life - this development was a new movement, and not a mere revival of the Labour political activity of the seventies, though a natural and logical consequence of the experience of the mid-Victorian community that preceded it.

Moreover the Labour movement was not alone in passing through this stage of growth. The vogue of Positivism associated with "middle-class conscience" is another of its manifestations. And it is suggestive to remember that the decline after the seventies in the prestige of Liberalism ran parallel with the decay of nonconformity. The new scientific Biblical criticism produced a reaction in the form of the mysticism of Anglo-Catholicism; similarly, although the departure of many Liberals into the Tory camp may have been due largely to economic motivation, it was accompanied by the rise of imperialism, the Irish business, suffragism, and all the

other appeals to the emotions that made up the political history of the last years of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth. The spate of Royal Commissions between the sixties and the eighties - typically Liberal in their naive pretensions of impartiality, scientific outlook, and creativeness - was succeeded by naked appeals to blind prejudice. The traditional Liberal outlook seemed to have become inadequate and unsatisfying. In tracing this change of atmosphere in his "England, 1870-1914", R.C.K. Ensor points again and again to instances where reasoned argument was cast aside and resort taken instead to mere dogmatic assertions of first principles: "Ulster will be free or die" was Bonar Law's answer to all attempted persuasion on the Irish question. It is significant, probably, that one of the earliest manifestations of this development - Plimsoll's famous demonstration in the Commons - was closely associated with the Labour movement.

But even more directly suggestive, perhaps, is the connection of Christian Socialism with Anglo-Catholicism. The headquarters of the Christian Social Union were at Pusey House, and virtually every one of the twenty or thirty Anglican clerics who aided the working-class socialists and "new unionists" was High Church. Anglo-Catholicism, of course, represented an authoritarian tendency, as well as a tendency to extend Christian principles into every aspect of social life. By contrast, being staunch nonconformists almost to a man, the "old unionist" leaders would accept the Liberal and

nonconformist position of almost complete freedom of religious belief, and did in fact accept the narrowing of the religious sphere that had accompanied and greatly facilitated this toleration. Religion to them tended to become a matter of what a man did on Sunday; (7) they separated life into what was "spiritual" and what was not. It was a natural consequence that the gospel of individualism to which they professed to adhere in the economic sphere was morally anarchical. It was in fact just those unionists who were the stoutest defenders of Sunday observance in the TUC debates - who had apparently erected their Christianity most completely into a system of formal observances - who were the most convinced individualists; and it is a fair generalisation for the 1890's that the stronger the chapels in any district, the weaker or more inert the trade unionism. (8)

To the "new" leaders, on the other hand, the community had organic characteristics, and all social questions, economic as well as merely "political" in the Liberal sense, had their moral implications. And thus, while many, such as Hardie, still

-
7. With his usual perceptiveness, Hardie recognised this narrowing of the religious sphere: "...since the Church thought fit to specialise on what it most unfairly calls the spiritual side of Christianity, it became necessary for some of us to concentrate upon the human side, by way at least of restoring the balance." (H. Fyfe: Keir Hardie, 13).
 8. See particularly the notes in the Webb Collection on the Trades Councils, where F. W. Galton, who visited a large number of these bodies, seems to take this as axiomatic.

held to Christianity, declaring that the Sermon on the Mount inspired their socialism, and others took to atheism, which was merely another form of religion, all appealed to unquestioned premises of human equality, of the wholeness of life and of the prime importance of the human element in a manner that was essentially religious. And this was an integral part of their revolt from Liberalism. In fact they often seem to have believed it would be enough to obtain acceptance of their new values; they were reluctant to go into detail as to the future form of society - once gain general acknowledgment that all men were brothers, requiring each his fair share of decent material conditions, and socialism would automatically follow. Convert men to the new faith, and the new, organic moral order would appear. Details were always subordinate to the principle, as well they might be while there was no real prospect of socialism.

Did this extension of political propaganda into the religious sphere have any real validity, or was it merely rationalisation of material self-interest? It is possible nearly always to cry "rationalisation" of any political philosophy, but usually this begs part of the question. It is the purpose of this chapter to show in some detail that the socialist part at least of the independent political Labour movement was really religious in many respects. But the motivation of the Labour movement has always contained a

considerable religious element. As has been seen, even the "old" unionists were by no means the individualists that they often professed themselves to be. And time and time again - so often, surely, that there must be some basis of reality in the choice of the words - one comes across the assertion that the objects of Labour organisations are the "uplifting" of the worker, the achievement of a "higher" form of life, the creation of "better" citizens. The worker always saw his material advancement as enabling a transformation of the whole of his existence, lifting him onto a higher plane. The fact that these expressions were caught up inevitably into platform verbiage, and rendered catch-phrases by endless repetition need not mean that they did not cover an important and vital reality. Similar considerations apply to the use of the term "brother" between unionists - still the practice in many great unions, and the custom, still common, of singing "Labour hymns" at political meetings.

The crude and brutal unionism of the 50's was a dark, impassioned revolt of self-respect against the sanctimonious inhumanity of employers. When Applegarth transformed its methods in the 60's, his stress on respectability signified a similar aim, now embodied in a more mature approach, of raising the standards of the artisans in the whole of their social relations. The first stirrings of new ambitions in the eighties took the form largely of the movement for the eight-

hour day, and, as has been seen, the demand for shorter hours (which in fact constantly recurs in trade union history) implies a significant stress on the importance of the human element in the economic system, and a desire for a higher standard in the whole of social life, even at the expense of higher wages. Thus the impulse was basically the same as Applegarth's motivation, but had grown much more urgent. To this extent the movement of the eighties represented an increased emphasis upon the religious side of unionism. But this tendency is seen more clearly when the newly-emerged ^{societies} socialist/ are considered.

All working-class socialists experienced a "conversion". It was a custom at socialist meetings for members to "testify" of the moment when, like a blinding flash, the beauty, symmetry and holiness of socialism had suddenly burst upon them. The vision would reveal itself suddenly from some book they were reading - William Morris, Hyndman's "England for All", Ruskin, J. Morrison Davidson or, very commonly later, "Merrie England" - or some speaker they heard. The S.D.F. actually produced a pamphlet entitled "How I Became a Socialist" in which a group of leaders disclosed how and when they had first seen the great light; the exceptions were those who wonderingly commenced: "I do not know the actual moment when I became a convinced socialist.... I suppose it began....." Harry Snell later professed: "I personally knew dozens of elderly

men who counted the days of their conscious spiritual life from the hour that the ideal of an organised and morally restrained Cooperative Commonwealth entered into and took possession of their minds." (9) Workers used to tramp many miles to hear a famous socialist, as if to a renowned preacher, for a spiritual experience. (9a)

On turning to look at the various leaders of the new movement individually, one sees this religious motivation more precisely, and that it took various forms.

It is almost impossible not to begin with Hardie, whose Christian mysticism is of course so well known. In fact it is difficult to paint in exaggerated colours the usual picture of Hardie as an Old Testament prophet: everything is there - the deep, tragic earnestness of his warnings, the passionate phrases, wrung from his depths with a strain that overlay but could not hide his lack of eloquence, the rock-like conviction that held him always to his course, the faith that saw beyond mere objections of detail, the seemingly mystic insight. Yet through all these shone a sword-sharp intellect - the most striking of Hardie's attributes in his writings - a mind that cut through to the essentials and expressed them with subtlety and perfect balance of emphasis yet in clear, simple, impassioned words. His was the true, rare judgment that is half based on sense: despite his occasional gross mistake -

9. Snell; 99.

9a. This had also been true earlier in the case of Radical speakers; but I do not think this fact detracts from the argument.

for instance his apparent belief that the workers would not be swayed by nationalist sentiment in 1914 -- it remains true to an astonishing degree that he could judge political reactions to a nicety. His ability to gauge the limits of necessary compromise amounted to genius.

He was the prophet, too, in his denunciation of the churches, and in his claim to lead them back to the Bible. The most striking instance was when he stood before the Congregational Conference of 1892, defending himself from proved and slovenly misrepresentation. Suddenly he lost self-control, accused the assembly of preaching only to the propertied, and, amidst the uproar this/created, ^{accusation} shouted: "You, do, you do, you do.....you disgrace -- you -- the Christian ministers of England." (10)

What is less often realised of Hardie is what little else his socialism contained beside this insistence on the moral basis of the economic order. "Socialism...is not a system of economics...it is life for the dying people," he declared, and it is difficult to get a more precise definition from him than this. "Socialism", he continued, "means fraternity founded on justice, and the fact that in order to

10. The Congregational Journal responded: "Mr. Hardie evidently intends to keep himself in the public eye, and when the newspaper reporters are in attendance he is apt to say something which he no doubt thinks will look startling in print. This is the only way, it seems to us, of accounting for the statements he made on Tuesday." The writer must have thought Hardie an exceptional actor if he believed the outburst was not spontaneous! (Labour Prophet, November, 1892).

secure this it is necessary to transfer land and capital from private to public ownership is a mere incident in the crusade," (11) His political philosophy was a religion, almost pure and simple.

Tom Mann and Ben Tillett were two other leaders of the new movement who brought such fire and so highly moral a tone to their public speaking that they were frequently likened at the time to missionaries of a new faith. Both frequently had the title "Reverend" prefixed to their names by joking Labour journalists. Although neither could match Hardie in intellectual depth, they too spoke in terms of the whole of life, exhorting their hearers to higher moral standards in every respect. For instance, in his Presidential Address to the Dockers' 1891 Conference, Mann could rise to these heights:

"Many thousands of us have had the misfortune to be deprived of those surroundings that are most conducive to the development of perfect men and women. We claim now, material necessities to lift us above worrying for food and shelter; but we claim more - we yearn for culture, we demand opportunities for physical and mental development, and we openly and fearlessly declare war against all that tends to keep us rivetted to earth." (12)

And later at the same conference:

"This Trade Union Movement will fritter away unless individuals like you and I are prepared to live lives of self-sacrifice in the noblest and holiest of ways. Don't think holiness belongs to the Church alone; it belongs to us as individuals..... Trade unionism is a noble movement, but it can only be noble by noble lives being lived by us individually." (13)

-
11. Lowe: Keir Hardie, 104.
 12. Report, 9.
 13. Ibid., 16-17.

A year or two later Mann asserted: "We accept in the fullest sense the doctrine of the brotherhood and sisterhood of the human family." (14) For his part, Tillet once delivered an address on "Man's Individual Responsibility", which contained references to Heine, Ibsen and Walt Whitman, pleading that all should regard the condition of those about them as their personal responsibility. (15) Although his usual role was that of a Savonarola denouncing the opposition of employers as cruel and evil (Beatrice Webb thought him a rantier), Tillet also continually besought the dockers to maintain high standards of personal discipline in the common cause. (16) Moreover the socialist teaching of these dockers' leaders was also so vague as to amount to little more than an appeal to the justice of more equal economic treatment, necessary if all were to live to the full.

Like Hardie, Mann had been a fervent temperance speaker before he entered the Labour movement. In 1893 it was rumoured that he had decided to take orders in the Anglican Church. In his memoirs he states that, although he was actually considering this step, there was never much prospect that he would finally take it. Despite his assertion that a curacy seemed in many ways similar to the work he was already performing, he gives the impression elsewhere that his intention

14. Mann: Appeal to the Yorkshire Textile Workers, 13.
15. Tillet: Man's Individual Responsibility (the address published as a pamphlet).
16. Eg. Report of the Dockers' Conference, 1891, 12.

would have been to convert the Church to his views. A curious feature of the incident was a message of welcome into the Church extended to Mann by a group of about thirty of the clergy who were attending the annual Church conference at the time. (17)

For reasons to be seen in a later chapter, there was little of the evangelist about the other leader of the dockers in their 1889 strike - John Burns, although Burns was in fact a teetotaler, and did urge the dockers to become more respectable. It is enough to say here that, despite his power as an orator, Burns's interests were in immediate, practical issues. He was not attracted by flights into the realm of political theory.

Another name that comes to mind in any discussion of the place of religion in the Labour movement is that of Arthur Henderson, who, as is well known, was a Methodist lay preacher. But Henderson does not and did not belong with the socialists of the 1890's. He was late in leaving the Liberals and was always a moderate, his religious views, like his political beliefs, being rather similar to those of the "old" unionists. He was content within Methodism, his Christianity being more a matter of decent personal relations than a burning zeal for social justice. A similar type in some ways, although with a personality all his own, was Will Crooks, whom Chesterton

described as the one Labour politician who was himself really a working man in type and spirit.(18) If it was only Crooks who could have fitted his earthy stories into a lecture on "Labour and Christianity" without sign of embarrassment, it was probably only an audience of workers that could have felt that they belonged there.(19) Crooks's religion too was largely a matter of common decency. But, if it lacked Hardie's fire and prophecy, it was none the less comprehensive, and held with as firm a conviction that it was something of real importance. It may well have been social justice at the level of the chapel pews, bridging a gap over which the pulpit could not reach.

There were, in fact, two working-class religions - or rather facets of the same system of religious and ethical beliefs. One was the idealism typified by Keir Hardie; the other the commonsense fellowship and brotherliness typified by Will Crooks. As well as some experience of the former, as already noted, Beatrice Webb had some experience of the latter at Bacup. In some respects the weavers seemed to her "unworldly" (as she expressed it) compared with the world she knew, with a higher code of personal morality. Eleven members of the family of weavers she lived with had been bequeathed half of an £80,000 estate, the other half being left to another, well-to-do, branch of the family. Considering themselves morally bound to do this, the eleven heirs had divided up their

18. G. Haw: Will Crooks, preface.

19. Christianity and the Labour Party - lectures given by Labour leaders in a series of meetings held in the East End, later published.

half of the money with thirty younger cousins, and had been astonished to learn that the other inheritors had not followed their example with their portion!! (20) Perhaps such a code could be observed only because it was infrequently subjected to strain - but it was observed.

Similarly the Webbs commented after witnessing the 1896 annual conference of the Miners' Federation:

"The sense of 'fair-play' is perhaps the most remarkable feature in these working-class organisations: there is an extraordinary absence of personal spite or intolerance. This amounts almost to a fault; they sacrifice efficiency and intellectual conviction to this overpowering instinct for 'equal treatment'." (21)

Never was there kindness like the kindness of the poor to the poor: small wonder that the workers were staggered at the unnatural "greed" and "ruthlessness" of the employers, whose whole accepted system of conduct was so different from their own. Moreover, for all its apparent informality the workers' code had its rigidity. The ne'er-do-well who transgressed it would be so ostracised as to be driven from the weaving community, and would eventually find his way to the worst parts of the East End or Manchester, Glasgow or Liverpool, where he could live without self-respect. (22)

One figure who seems to combine burning idealism and good fellowship is George Lansbury. An enthusiastic Anglican layman and a curious mixture of the working-man's practicality

20. My Apprenticeship, 160, 166.

21. Methods of Social Study, 176.

22. My Apprenticeship, 164.

and naivete, Lansbury impressed all who met him with his high moral code and the religious conviction that underlay all his political activity. His judgment could often be questioned, but never his Christian sincerity; and it is surely significant of the nature of the new movement that such a man as Lansbury could feel that it represented Christianity in politics.

And there were many others prominent in the movement who adopted it as an expression of their religious belief.

Caroline Martyn, a gifted middle-class helper whose humble sincerity won her wide affection and respect before her early death. in 1896, came by way of Christian Socialism, having been prominent in the Christian Social Union before transferring to the Labour movement proper. (23) Morrison Davidson, the Scottish journalist, a very advanced Radical in the sixties and a socialist before the end of the seventies, whose writings brought a large number of converts into the ILP, expounded a political philosophy that amounted virtually to Christian anarchism. And, for his part, Ramsay MacDonald produced a biological exposition of the historical origins of socialism - the result of his mind's peculiar blend of sensitivity and science (he had read a good deal in biology and geology) - that so embraced the whole of life that the movement could only take up its place in it as a religious phenomenon (although the author seems detached from it all, almost as an observer).

"Socialism", he wrote, "marks the growth of Society, not the

23. Labour Annual, 1898, 212. Miss Martyn was a member of the National Administrative Council of the ILP at the time of her death.

uprising of a class (24) Annie Besant, essentially mystic in her makeup, came from her work as a preacher of "free-thought" to find a temporary, deeper satisfaction in socialism before moving on into theosophy.

Nor could any discussion of the religious characteristics of the Labour movement of the nineties be complete without reference to Robert Blatchford. So many recruits to socialism were won by his "Merrie England" that the book must mirror some at least of the impulse that was expressed in the emergence of the new political movement. And "Merrie England" does present socialism in quasi-religious form. Although Blatchford puts his case in the form of a plea that socialism is not an unpractical ideal but rather the only reasonable system of social organisation, deliberately appealing to reason rather than the emotions, this is obviously only a propagandist device: the new order is pictured as a complete change in the whole of social life, requiring new values in architecture, recreation, family life, music and art, and every other social activity that enters the author's mind. So far was Blatchford's socialism from being materialistic that it was an ascetic society that was envisaged: working hours were to be reduced to three or four a day partly by greatly diminishing the amount of goods used. Houses were to be furnished in the most severe simplicity on similar lines to the Japanese with none of the clutter of upholstered arm-chairs and sofas and all the

ornaments and pianos and other petty luxuries that crowded the middle-class home and represented the fruit of the middle-class industrial civilisation. In place of all this selfish ostentation would come the simple delights of good fellowship, uninhibited by bourgeois property-worship. If there were no petty luxury, there would be enough necessaries for all, and ample time to enjoy them. Materialistic gratifications would be despised, and less motive would remain for men to exploit their fellows.

This was surely a religion, and it sold two million copies of "Merrie England", for it was the essential teaching of the book. Its essence was something very different from the rigid bitter logic of the SDF, which had awakened so slight a response. And in the Clarion Blatchford and his colleagues tried to demonstrate how well these principles operated in practice. Particularly until the death of "the Bounder", E. F. Fay, in 1895, its pages gave the following more rollicking good fun than newspaper readers had ever known. (When the "Clarion Four" were photographed, for instance, a back as well as a front view left no doubt as to their proportions). Clarion cycling clubs roamed the countryside in hearty enjoyment of the simple life; Clarion choirs sang for the sake of singing. There were Clarion Scouts, and Clarionettes, and societies of the Clarion way of life almost without end, all oozing good clean fellowship. As was seen in an earlier chapter,

Blatchford was never very interested in politics, believing that political activity inevitably corrupted those who entered upon it: Clarion socialism was to come into being by the infection, the permeation, of good cheer. (As Hardie saw, this was expecting too much, and there was too much merriment about the Clarion).

Because of the marked religious element in his teaching, it was only natural that Blatchford should eventually make an attack on the churches, with all the bitterness of a high priest of another religion. When he unexpectedly gave rein to his hostility in 1900, this breach of the good-natured tolerance that had seemed to characterise the Clarion fellowship dealt his wing of the Labour movement a severe blow. His followers had sensed nothing incompatible between his gospel and Christianity; few of them were prepared to follow him into atheism. Nevertheless, and despite the later split in the movement when Blatchford took up an "imperialist" attitude after 1910 and began to press the need to arm against Germany, many of the Clarion activities continued in good force up to the outbreak of the World War.

The most direct and probably the most remarkable manifestation of the religious aspect of the new movement was the Labour Church, an institution that flourished astonishingly in the 1890's. And this organisation was preceded by a London group which attempted to propagate the idea that

socialism was a development from Christianity. It was associated with a paper, the Christian Socialist, which had a precarious existence from 1883 to 1891, edited for a time by Champion and later by W. H. Paul Campbell, who in 1886 was one of the founders of a Christian Socialist Society. This body, which remained in existence for a few years, is said to have been more socialist than Christian, but most of its members were apparently Christian theists, and its meetings began to grow into a form of Sunday worship. No records of its activities seem to have survived, and apparently it had little influence. (25)

Established by John Trevor, a former Congregational preacher, at Manchester in October, 1891, the first Labour Church soon found a hall seating 400 inadequate for its Sunday evening meetings. After its second meeting, addressed by Blatchford, it had to hire a building with accommodation for 2000. Part of this early success was due, of course, to Blatchford's extraordinary popularity at that time, especially in Manchester. (26) In January, 1892, however, Tom Mann attracted an audience of no fewer than 4000; but there were complaints that a quarter of the congregation left abruptly towards the end of the meeting just before the collection was taken. Only 85 had actually enrolled in the organisation at that time - it was said that many who were enthusiastic were unable to pay the small subscription. But when the Church

25. Clayton, 52-3.

26. Labour Prophet, Jan., 1892.

paper, the Labour Prophet, was first issued in that month, the 2000 copies that had been printed were quite insufficient, and it was found that no fewer than 4500 were needed. By May, after fixed subscriptions were abolished, the membership of the Church itself had doubled. (27)

It was also in May 1892 that the Duke's Alley Congregational Church at Bolton, led by its preacher, reformed itself into a second Labour Church, doubling its attendances in the process; and there was a similar development at Oldham, where a Congregational body that had recently reconstituted itself as a "Civic Church" decided to affiliate. (28) And soon a number of other Labour Churches were established. The peak was reached about 1895, when there were at least 26 Churches, 12 of them in Lancashire and 5 in Yorkshire. (29)

Although there was some variation among these bodies, most of them seem to have preached a type of Theism that would not wound their Christian members. The following were the principles accepted by the first conference of the Churches in 1893:

- "(1) That the Labour Movement is a Religious Movement.
- (2) That the Religion of the Labour Movement is not a class Religion, but unites members of all classes in working for the abolition of commercial slavery.
- (3) That the Religion of the Labour Movement is not Sectarian or Dogmatic but Free Religion, leaving each man free to develop his relations with the Power that brought him into being.

27. Ibid., February, May, 1892.

28. Ibid., May.

29. Labour Annual, 1895, 48-59, 214-19.

(4) That the emancipation of Labour can only be realized so far as men learn both the Economic and Moral Laws of God and heartily endeavour to obey them.

(5) That the development of Personal Character and the improvement of Social Conditions are both essential to man's emancipation from moral and social bondage." (30)

Yet neither members nor speakers were bound even to these vague principles. One of the favourite phrases of the Church's spokesmen was that "the great religious movement of our time is the movement for the emancipation of Labour"; all who took part in this movement were "doing God's work". (31)

The whole phenomenon was a curious repetition of the Chartist Church movement of earlier in the century. The Labour services were conducted on the familiar chapel lines, with Labour hymns - the songs of Carpenter, Morris, Tom Maguire, and others of much inferior literary calibre, readings from socialist authors, and a lecture-sermon. There were choirs, although bands were apparently at least as popular, and the inevitable banners. Classes were conducted, on the Bible Class model, in economics, ethics, social history, the study of religion, and so on. There were even Labour Church christenings, marriages, and burials. (32) The Socialist Sunday Schools established by some of the Churches remained a force some time after the Churches had mostly disappeared, a Sunday School sometimes being formed as a particular Church

30. Clayton, 95.

31. Ibid., 96; Elton, 191, 696.

32. According to George Lansbury (My Life, 78), Labour hymns and selected readings formed part of the regular meeting of the Bow and Bromley Branch of the SDF in 1892.

neared the end of its existence. The Churches were also in contact with the Glasgow Labour Army which, as mentioned in an earlier chapter, was established in June and July 1891 on the Salvation Army model by Frank Smith, Hardie's intimate and a former Salvation Army officer. They also invited the Brotherhood Churches, a small group of societies mainly in London, led by J. Bruce Wallace and similar to themselves, to attend their 1899 conference, but received no reply. (33)

For all the sincerity of their strivings to become a really religious institution, the Labour Churches were far from neglecting the immediate interests of the Labour movement. The Labour Prophet was scarcely distinguishable in its matter from any other Labour periodical, giving ample space to discussions of the need for an independent Labour Party and similar topics. The Churches were definitely socialist, on Hardie's lines. They reached the height of their influence quickly, were never very strong, then died away rather gradually. The wonder, of course, and the significant feature of their brief history, is that they spread as widely and endured as well as they did. As their own spokesmen pointed out, they were in a difficult position: they raised questions of belief that were best left undiscussed, were scorned by the atheistic socialists, and yet did not attract the bulk of religious-minded working-men, who of course still preferred worship at an ordinary chapel,

worship being largely an individual act in any case, to a parody of Christian observances. The decline in the strength of nonconformity was only relative: the chapel remained one of the most important social institutions of the working-classes. Although it did meet a certain need - Clayton claims that many attended the Churches to take part in the singing and hear the visiting lecturers who would never have ventured into a Party meeting or stood at a cold street corner⁽³⁴⁾ - there was no real place for the Labour Church.

On the other hand, it was not a one-man movement. It was claimed at the end of the first year that Trevor was already leaving the first of the Churches much to its own devices, and his health failed shortly afterwards, causing him to withdraw almost completely and resign the editorship of the Prophet. In any case he had no very striking personality. And Churches lingered on for many years yet, often alongside active ILP branches. After the first enthusiasm, there was a decline in the number of Churches from the 26 of 1895 to 18 in 1898, but there were still 17 in existence in 1903. By 1898 there were 16 Socialist Sunday Schools, mostly established since 1895, and there were 17 in 1900, several with between 60 and 100 pupils, increasing to 22 by 1903.⁽³⁵⁾

There were other religious or quasi-religious organisations too claiming some connection with the socialist

34. Clayton, 96.

35. Labour Annual, 1898, 133; 1903, 111; 1900, 64; 1903, 113.

and Labour movements, but coming less definitely within their bounds. Various groups set up communities, practically all communist in organisation, to begin the purer life at once. There were about half-a-dozen of these short-lived "colonies" in Britain in the late nineties, several publishing their own journals, but they seem to have been largely middle-class, and attracted little or no attention from the workers. (36) The Brotherhood Trust, an offshoot of J. Bruce Wallace's Brotherhood Movement, intended to develop into such a community. Organised in groups of "Tens" under "Helpers" and "Deans", it aimed at obtaining a million recruits who would together withdraw into an "Industrial City of Refuge" before the close of the century. As the century neared its end, however, the date was postponed, and eventually the Trust became just another co-operative society, operating a system of barter among producers by means of its own "Labour cheques". (37)

In this chapter we have of course been concerned mainly with the advanced wing of the working-classes - those who were active in the independent Labour political movement, who were as yet in a small minority among the workers. Even at their peak, the 26 Labour Churches were but a drop in the ocean compared with the membership of the established and nonconformist churches. To help preserve a true balance, it is as well to glance briefly at the political situation in Liverpool, where

36. Labour Annuals.

37. Ibid., especially 1896, 64.

religious motives among the workers operated in quite a different sense. In that city, for some years from about 1896, the Tory Democrat A.T. (later Sir Archibald) Salvidge wielded a powerful political force in his Workingmen's Conservative Association, a body that was often at loggerheads with the local Tory leaders, but which had enough strength to be able to bring at least one M.P. reluctantly and publicly to heel. One of the questions on which Salvidge crossed swords with the Party chiefs was the inclusion of a fair wages clause in City Council contracts, which he was able to obtain despite their opposition. But, according to his biographer, this type of question was far from being the most important issue with which Salvidge's Association concerned itself:

".....Though Salvidge was not inattentive to the type of question one would naturally expect to interest an association such as his, the main issue on which he again and again rallied his democratic followers and roused the working-class electorate of Liverpool to heights of passionate feeling was concerned, not with any demands regarding housing, or wages, or conditions of labour, but with the correct procedure for the conduct of divine service in the Church of England. To thousands of Liverpool men and women, sharing the precarious existence of the wage-earning classes, the question of whether certain candles were lit in certain churches, or whether a cleric wore an embroidered stole instead of a plain one, assumed an importance that was not only pressing but almost personal." (38)

-
38. S. Salvidge: Salvidge of Liverpool, 29-30, 35-6. Clayton, 82, states that in all parts of Britain the Irish and the Roman Catholic clergy opposed the ILP because it was weakening the Liberal Party and thus endangering Home Rule.

The fervour of Low Church Anglicanism in Liverpool was probably, of course, a reaction to the size and influence of the Irish population in the city, whose preoccupation with their national question was, also, as has been seen, the despair of the local ILP branch.

The fact that so many of the workers continued to attend church or chapel on Sunday, however, does not greatly detract from the significance of the marked decline in the influence of evangelicallism. And in this connection Chamberlain's confirmation of Beatrice Webb's judgment, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, corresponds closely with W. Halsey's well-known thesis - that the preoccupation of the working-class with religion had been of primary importance in keeping Britain stable in the nineteenth century when continental countries were coping with a series of desperate rebellions. As the religious sanction crumbled, a large number of the workers were bound to turn more of their attention and energy to questions of social justice.

CHAPTER 14.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE REVOLT IN THE TRADES
UNION CONGRESSES, 1890-1899.(a). 1890-1895.

It is necessary now to outline the sequence of events in the Trades Union Congresses that culminated in the conversion of the trade union movement to independence in politics - in other words, in the formation of the Labour Representation Committee in February 1900. This is not a simple story. As was seen in Chapter 7, in which the Congresses of the eighties were considered, the decisions of these gatherings are often impossible to interpret with any certainty. Interested primarily in practical issues, most of the unionists gave little heed to the logic of the political thought they seized upon to justify their purposes. There are many apparent contradictions in the voting - many questions about the intentions of the delegates to which the evidence gives no answer. Even the explanations given in newspaper interviews and reports of the delegates to their unions at the time are often demonstrably false: contemporaries themselves could make little sense of many of the decisions. The main elements of consistency running through the debates - and from these it can be seen how confusing they could appear to a casual observer - were as follows: the delegates were

usually prepared to grant support to a specific request by a union whatever the principle involved; they would also occasionally assent to a vague declaration of a remote objective - such as socialism; but any question of taking practical combined action for general purposes, such as the formation of a really independent Labour party, was quite a different matter. Issues of this sort were judged entirely from the viewpoint of tactics and practical effects.

Thus, as has already been pointed out, the victory of the supporters of an eight hours bill at the 1890 Congress did not mean, despite John Burns's assertion to the contrary, that the Congress had been won over to socialism. The eight hours vote had been carried only with the reluctant assistance of the Miners' Federation, who on every other issue were among the most determined antagonists of the "new" party. In fact very few of those who voted for the measure were "new" men. And Burns's claim that the fact that 45 of the 60 resolutions passed at the Congress were collectivist represented a socialist victory was quite baseless: the proportion had been quite as high from the very beginnings of the Congresses. Collectivism in particular cases was one conception to the unionists; as a general principle or even, for a year or two yet, as a symbol of complete independence of the Liberals, it was quite another.

In fact when at this same 1890 Congress a demand for the nationalisation of the means of production was proposed by the Social Democrat James Macdonald of the London Tailors in the form of an amendment to the usual vague resolution that the unions' "utmost efforts" be devoted to obtaining labour representation, it was defeated by no fewer than 363 votes to 55.⁽¹⁾ And thus was in spite of the fact that in addition to the 25 delegates from the unions of unskilled workers there were among the total of 457 attending the Congress 58 from the Trades and Labour Councils and more than a hundred from various small craftsmen's unions, groups from which one might expect some support for a socialist resolution. (In addition the National Amalgamated Seamen and Firemen had sent 24 delegates and must also be classed as a "new" union; but, as has been seen, their leader, J. H. Wilson, was not a socialist, and it is impossible to suggest how their representatives may have voted). As usual it was as a demonstration of complete independence in politics that the amendment was supported. This aspect was particularly stressed by Burns, who made a strong appeal in its favour. (On rising in an earlier session to make his first speech at a Congress, Burns had received an unprecedented ovation).⁽²⁾

1. 1890 TUC Report, 35-8.
2. Ibid., 20.

Yet in reply two of the Lib.-Lab. M.P.s - John Wilson (of the Durham Miners) and Fenwick - effectively asserted that they themselves had very frequently voted against the Gladstone Government in the House. On Threlfall's initiative an addition was made to the resolution that a conference be called of all those interested to discuss the question of payment of members. Pickard, who was also a Lib.-Lab. Member by this time, then assured them that payment of members lay well in the future! If they wanted independent representation, they must pay for it themselves. He also raised the issue of expediency by stating that as a purely Labour candidate he doubted that he would ever have been returned. For all the apparent dissatisfaction of a number of the delegates - the eight hours vote seems at least to suggest that a majority were growing impatient of some aspects of the policies of the "old" leaders - the Lib.-Labs. seem to have had the best of the debate.(3)

When it came to the election of the Congress Secretary and Parliamentary Committee, again they seem to have carried the day. Although he gave his health as the excuse, Broadhurst's retirement from the Secretaryship, announced before the Congress, was probably forced on partly at least by the storm over the eight hours question. But, despite the fact that they claimed it as a victory, on the grounds that the

new Secretary was in some way less rigid in his views, the election of Fenwick in his place was surely far from being a notable gain for the supporters of an eight hours bill, as there was never the slightest misunderstanding on the point that he was opposed to the measure. The fact that the "legalists" were not able to run a candidate of their own is surely a fair measure of their real weakness. (4)

When the results of the voting for the Parliamentary Committee were announced, it was found that they had been hardly more successful in this contest. Now this election was a complicated matter. Membership of the Committee was highly prized, but as only one representative could be elected for each occupation, votes were traded in a undignified fashion among the large blocks of delegates. A candidate from a small union rarely had much chance. Usually there were few changes from year to year, and there was a vague tradition that the Congress president be given a seat. Thus Matkin, who had declared in favour of the eight hours' bill in his Presidential Address, was returned. Pickard, with 171 votes, was ahead of J. Wilson of the Durham Miners with 148; this, as has been seen, was a victory for the Miners' Federation, achieved with the support of the eight hours party. J. H. Wilson, who had his large contingent of sailors' delegates

behind him and was on good terms with all parties, headed the poll with 237, but Birtwhistle, who was strongly opposed to the eight hours bill, was next with 215; and it was only his resignation because of the eight hours vote that brought Burns, with 101, on to the Committee. Harford of the ASRS was another successful eight hours supporter with 140; but he had moved the resolution for Labour representation as a LEA man, and so could hardly be regarded as one of the "new" section. (As has been seen, Threlfall himself, the leading spirit of the LEA, had always supported the eight hours bill). The rest of the successful candidates had all been members previously, as indeed had Harford. Quelch, the only other candidate from the "new" party in addition to Burns (who in fact was an ASE delegate) received only 32. Possibly the results were affected to some extent by the fact that delegates from 28 bodies, including a number of "new" unions, were excluded from the voting through not having fulfilled all the technical requirements for contributing to the funds. But surely, if the "new" party had possessed any real strength in the Congress, it would have put forward more candidates and made a better showing than this. (5)

Now that the walls had been breached on the eight hours issue, the contest was joined in earnest in 1891. In 1890

there had been the abnormally large number of 457 delegates: now in 1891 there were no fewer than 552 - a figure that made the proceedings almost unmanageable. This had resulted partly from the attempts of various unions to amass the greatest possible voting strength: there were delegations of 38 from the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, 40 from the Miners' National Union, 16 from the Seamen's and Firemen's Union, 20 from the National Amalgamated Union of Labour, 38 from the Amalgamated Carpenters and Joiners, and so on. Despite protests from several unions, the Parliamentary Committee had ruled before the Congress that each society was entitled only to one delegate for each thousand members or fraction of a thousand, and that for each delegate a contribution of £1 must be paid. (6) For the first time the Committee had a balance of funds - amounting to £1147 7s 4d! (7) Because of their inability to bear the expense of more delegates, the Gasworkers had sent only four - a fraction of the number they were entitled to - and the dockers' unions a total of only 15. Nevertheless, after a confused and heated debate during the early sessions, it was decided, voting by cards under the new system, to revert to the old method of allowing one vote to each delegate until another system had been given fuller consideration. (8)

6. 1891 TUC Report, 26.

7. Ibid., 67.

8. Ibid., 26, 26-8.

As was noted in the chapter dealing with the eight hours campaign, the resolution on this question, which was again the main centre of interest, was again carried, this time 232-163, although for some reason a large proportion of the delegates abstained from voting. Their number, in fact, actually exceeded the favourable majority. Yet surely it was this eight hours question, more than any other, that had attracted the record number of delegates!⁽⁹⁾

And this was the only victory which the "new" party could claim in 1891. Although Hardie and P. J. King - a member of the "new" section who was to achieve a certain prominence a few years later - had been very active in mobilising the "legalist" forces for the election of the Parliamentary Committee, (they had worked in the same fashion for the eight hours vote) they suffered even a more striking defeat in this contest than in the previous year. Curiously, only 69% of the possible votes were cast: this was probably due to many of the delegates voting for fewer of the candidates than the number of vacancies. In any case, John Wilson of the Durham Miners was easily at the head of the poll with 318 votes to J. H. Wilson's 282; Tillet with 141 failed by two votes to secure a seat; and Thorne and Quelch received only 72 and 57 respectively. Harford, Threlfall and Matkin were also successful, but although they had all expressed their

9. Ibid., 41.

support of the eight hours bill they were hardly representative of the "new" party. And their success forms a marked contrast with the failure of the avowed socialists. (10)

When Labour representation was discussed, Threlfall stressed persistence "irrespective of any and every party" and an addition declaring that the action taken should be "independent of party politics" was supported very strongly 256-26. (Here again, however, half the delegates apparently abstained from voting). Yet when Hardie attempted to add a provision for setting up a political fund this was rejected by 200-93. Certainly the creation of a fund would raise practical questions of considerable difficulty, and for many years yet unionists were to regard Labour representation as a matter for separate action by the various trades. For all the stress placed on independence, which was quite sincere, it was may well have been the LEA conception of the term rather than Hardie's which many of the delegates had been voting for. But it was not easy to see the difference. (11)

At the 1892 Congress the contest was resumed on similar lines, further slight progress being made by the "new" element. The resolution for the eight hours bill was again carried, the only new development in this connection being the conversion of the Lancashire textile workers, partly at least because of

10. Ibid., 78.

11. Ibid., 86.

the inclusion of the provision for trade option. (12) The main storm of the Congress, which arose over Fenwick's action in voting against the Miners' Eight Hours Bill in the Commons, revealed the futility of the whole position, for as Secretary of the Parliamentary Committee he himself had actually promoted the sponsoring of the measure. In its Report the Committee mentioned that the Bill had been rendered unacceptable by an amendment carried - "we regret to say" - "by five votes, one of which was recorded by your Secretary!" (13) When he was now castigated for his action, he was able to remind his critics that they had known his views when they had elected him as Secretary. (14) Yet the eight hours section had not been strong enough to put forward a man of their own, and now, when they ran R. Chisholm Robertson of the Scottish Miners' Federation against him, Fenwick was again returned to the office by 274-174. In the election for the Parliamentary Committee, Fillett was now successful, third from the top of the poll, but otherwise the results were similar to those of the previous year, John Wilson of Durham again being the successful miners' representative. (15)

When political action was considered, the "new" party seem to have been rather more successful than previously.

Hardie now obtained a direction to the Parliamentary Committee

-
- 12. 1892 TUC Report, 61.
 - 13. Ibid., 25.
 - 14. Ibid., 30.
 - 15. Ibid., 71.

to prepare a scheme for furthering Labour representation with special consideration to be given to the problem of finance. By a majority of only one vote - 141-140 - it was decided that the scheme should be for "independent" Labour representation. (16) And when James MacDonald of the SDF proposed that

"no candidate shall receive the support of the working classes unless he is in agreement with the principle of complete national control of the means of production and distribution."

this was rejected only by 153-128. To achieve this measure of support however, he had conceded some of his ground. As the delegates would be quick to emphasize, "complete national control" could be something much less than "national ownership and control". And there is the further point that on this resolution as on Hardie's previous amendment for "independent" political action only about 290 of the 500 delegates had voted. (17) What light, if any, does this throw on the attitude of the Congress? The only possible conclusion - and this is supported by later evidence - seems to be that a large proportion considered these debates remote and futile, and thus refused to express an opinion.

In the following year, 1893, the "new" party continued their gradual progress, but in the same very limited field. Their victories give the same impression of hollowness. When

16. Ibid., 43.

17. Ibid., 46.

the Parliamentary Committee presented their scheme for financing Labour candidates, it proved to be merely on voluntary lines, unions contributing only if they wished at the rate of five shillings for each thousand members. (18) (It was a curious commentary on the scheme that two men of such divergent views as Tillet and John Wilson of Durham, both members of the Committee, should combine to move and second its adoption). But Hardie's following made no protest that this was inadequate - their interest had apparently turned to the ILP newly created at Bradford. The only objection came from an LEA man who protested against the provision that the fund was to be administered by a separate committee, on the ground that there was no need for a second body in addition to the LEA. (19)

From the viewpoint of the "new" party, the climax of the Congress came with the adoption of the socialist objective, on this occasion clearly stated as the "collective ownership and control of all the means of production and distribution". Yet there are hints in the debate that the issue was not as clear-cut as might be supposed. For instance J. Havelock Wilson, who regarded himself as a Liberal and an opponent of socialism, spoke in support of this objective, yet at the same time stated that he disapproved of the speeches of other delegates who had also supported it. Denying their

18. Parliamentary Committee's circular letters to unions, 1892-3 - usually bound with Congress Report.

19. 1893 TUC Report, 43-4.

charges that the Liberal-Labour Members of Parliament were party hacks, he averted that it was often good tactics to support a Liberal measure although it might be very imperfect from the Labour viewpoint. And Burns, who was back at the Congress for the first time since 1890, managed in a well-known speech to base his approval upon a bitter, thinly veiled attack on Keir Hardie:

"although crudely drawn (!), it (this socialist objective) cut right to the kernel of the social and labour problem, (enabling discrimination between false and genuine labour politicians) whether Liberal or Tory, and five or six of the bogus independent labour parties that had come into existence." He also described these "bodies" as "arrant frauds -- in the name of independent Labour and Socialism -- going about the country doing everything to disintegrate Labour and trade unionism."

This outburst may or may not have had an effect -- since Burns was later returned a very easy first in the voting for the Parliamentary Committee, possibly it was of some influence. But in any case there was the same curious feature in the division as has been noticed in the previous "victories" of the "advanced" party -- the resolution, (which was actually an amendment) was carried at the crucial vote by 137-97, yet there were 380 delegates at the Congress, so that almost half had not participated. (20) Moreover, surely Hardie's notion, which followed -- that Labour Members should always sit in opposition in the Commons -- was the logical complement to the

socialist objective. As far as Hardie and the ILP were concerned, the Socialist aim was little more than a symbol for this attitude of complete, uncompromising independence. Yet this motion aroused no discussion and apparently little interest, and was rejected 119-96. (21) Once again he was trying to show the issue to the delegates more clearly than they wished to see it.

The eight hours resolution, now virtually part of the Congress ritual, was carried 97-18 -- more than two-thirds of the delegates abstaining from voting. (22) And when the officials were elected Hardie, who challenged Fenwick for the Secretaryship, received only 89 votes to 257. It has already been mentioned that Burns was well in the lead in the list for the Parliamentary Committee; Broadhurst was next, followed by Maudsley, the other best-known leader of the "old" party. Cowey of the Miners' Federation narrowly defeated John Wilson; J. Havelock Wilson again retained his place and with the sole exception of Tillett, the other successful candidates were all "old" unionists. With the lowest successful candidate receiving 114 votes, the socialists Macdonald and Thorne gained only 79 and 61 respectively, while Threlfall had 77 and Matkin only 26. (23) While it is

21. Ibid., 49. de Roussiers: The Labour Question in Britain, 388, declared that the passing of the socialist resolutions in 1893-4 was of no significance whatever.

22. 1893 TUC Report, 56.

23. Ibid., 81.

impossible to suggest any detailed explanation of these results, they do seem to show that the socialists carried little weight. On the other hand it is possible that despite the high place given to Broadhurst and Mawdsley the remarkable vote for Burns, who of course had the reputation of being very "advanced", is an indication that the delegates were far from satisfied with the caution of the "old unionist" leaders and their willingness to compromise with official Liberalism. (24)

An item that significantly reappeared at this Congress was the question of a general federation of unions. Discussed in the mid-seventies, in the early eighties and again in 1890, when little interest had been taken, this project was now coming to the surface again as the "new" unions found their power waning rapidly as the trade boom receded. In its first form the resolution, which directed the Parliamentary Committee to call conferences to establish a federation or federations, was concerned with the unskilled workers, but it was soon amended to cover the older unions as well. A project that involved almost insuperable practical difficulties, it was to be discussed at later Congresses for some years, but only half-heartedly by most of the unions until it suddenly became

24. Perhaps Burns's success at the 1892 general election had added even to his outstanding popularity as demonstrated at the 1890 Congress. But if this was so, Hardie does not seem to have gained much prestige among the delegates from his victory at West Ham.

a question of real urgency simultaneously with the issue of political representation. (25)

When the Congress reassembled in 1894, there were no fresh developments of any importance, and in fact the tension appears to decline. The failure of the Liberal Government of 1892-95 to implement the Newcastle Programme was now quite obvious, and must have won many recruits for the ILP: however, the Parliamentary Committee, which felt strongly enough on the political situation to exclaim that "representative government is now regarded in many quarters as a mere delusion and a sham", was more concerned with the rejection of Commons' measures by the House of Lords. (26) Yet the Committee's appeal to the unions in preparation for the proposed conference to establish a political fund had received only two replies -

both from societies of weavers. Apparently the unions were not interested: it is probable that the ILP were wary of placing themselves in a position where they might be subject to Congress control. (27)

Although it was on this occasion that Fenwick was at last ousted from the Secretaryship, this did not result in any marked advantage to the "new" party. There were three candidates: in the first ballot S. Woods, the Liberal M.P. who was secretary of the Miners' Federation, received 140 votes to 117 for

25. 1893 TUC Report, 66-7.

26. 1894 TUC Report, 1 (Parliamentary Committee's Annual Report).

27. Ibid., 3.

Fenwick and 105 for Tom Mann. Thus Mann was eliminated, and the result of the second ballot was Woods 211, Fenwick 141. Woods, of course, was an ally of the "advanced" party only on the issue of the eight hours bill. And the results for the Parliamentary Committee were very similar to those of the previous Congress. (28)

When the resolution affirming the socialist objective, moved this year by Hardie and seconded by Macdonald, was again considered, it was carried, as if automatically, by 219-61, with about 50 abstentions. Once again, "as one of the old reactionary gang" (his own self-description), J. H. Wilson gave it his support, but it is probably significant that he appealed to the protagonists to turn their attention to matters of more immediate importance. And thus the scene was set for the unexpected counter-attack of the following Congress of 1895. (29)

There had been discussion in previous years among some of the "old" unions of the advisability of withdrawing from the Congresses, but none had actually taken this step, and now a different device was adopted in the shape of a coup d'état. The way in which this was carried through is well known; acting on an instruction to prepare new standing orders for the Congresses, which for some years had been obviously most

28. Ibid., 60.

29. Ibid., 53.

unwieldy and inefficient, half of the Parliamentary Committee led by Mawdsley and Holmes and supported, to the astonishment of most observers, by Burns, drew up a new set of rules which excluded the Trades Councils and all delegates who were not "permanent paid working officials" of the union or workers at the trade they were representing. In addition, it was provided that voting was to be taken on the "card system", each union casting 1000 votes for each 1000 of its membership. And they insisted upon these new provisions being voted upon for adoption under the very system that they would introduce; this procedure was agreed to within the Committee only on the Chairman's casting vote. The object was of course to exclude the delegates who were interested in political action rather than industrial trade unionism, and thus expel a large proportion of the "new" party. Although it was also pleaded as a justification of the new standing orders that the acceptance of Trades Council delegates resulted in dual representation for many trades, the main reason for their exclusion was that Trades Council men did in fact tend to be of this type, and were held to be not really representative of unionism. It was too much for Broadhurst to stomach - he himself would be excluded along with Hardle and other ILP men - and he joined with the "new" party in vigorous opposition.

In the debate that resulted, Mawdsley and his colleagues made no attempt to justify their action on

constitutional grounds, where of course precedent was the only available guide. Their whole stress was openly on expediency - that the end would justify the means. When G. N. Barnes of the ASE argued that the Congress would never have given the instruction if it had previous realised that this could result, Maudsley retorted:

"That's their look-out. We saw the Congress was losing whatever power and influence it had. We are determined to pull it back into the old paths."

It was time, he stated, that they showed they were a Congress of trade unions, and nothing else. "The Parliamentary Committee had only the best interests of Labour in view"; and their avowed object was to shut out "men who had somehow managed to cling to the skirts of the Labour party". Holmes echoed this statement, without adding to it:

"The time had come for a change; some better system of government was needed. If there was to be a Trades Union Congress, it ought not to be turned into a political pandemonium as it had been from year to year."

And Cowey of the Miners' Federation spoke in similar terms, as also did Burns, who brought his usual vehemence into the contest. Among the members of the Parliamentary Committee who opposed were J. H. Wilson and Matkin. The voting, conducted on the new system, gave a clear majority in favour of the new orders: 604,000-357,000. (30)

Although this stroke on the part of the reactionaries has generally been condemned almost without qualification, justification is readily possible. For all their protests at the method adopted, a surprising number of the union leaders approved the actual results. On the floor of the Congress, for instance, even Tillett, while bitterly opposing the device, stated that he supported the new requirements for delegates and the exclusion of mere politicians. And, although this argument was not explicitly used, if the reactionaries were justified in their claim - and most unionists seem to have agreed that they were - that the Congresses had become no longer truly representative of unionism, then there would be little point or justice in permitting the intruders to vote upon the question of their own exclusion. The question of whether the "old" party were being "undemocratic" in their action was not really relevant: the TUC was not a whole community but a section of the community, which had always had to guard itself jealously against the intrusion of outsiders. There could be no objection to politicians so long as they were trade unionist politicians - if they wished, let the others, who represented a different group of interests, form a congress of their own. To a large extent the end did justify the means employed. There was in fact a good deal to be said for the "old" party's analysis: many of the "new" section were in reality politicians rather

than unionists, and their strength in the Congresses had grown out of all proportion to the relative importance of their following in the field of industry.

As long as the Congresses had been more or less homogeneous in composition, their rather casually-planned machinery had been reasonably adequate. But the division of the movement into two opposing parties had raised difficult problems of government and made a more elaborate constitutional structure necessary. Questions concerning the delegation of power and the extent to which a majority could bind a minority had now to be answered. Nor was it a simple matter to decide upon the best form of constitution; although Tillett and others appealed to democratic principles in fighting the introduction of card voting, there was at least as much to be said in favour of the system as against it from the democratic point of view. As the card system provided that the number of votes for each union bore no relation to the number of delegates it sent, but that its delegates held cards in proportion to its membership, it would certainly enable the large unions to dominate the Congresses; but was this any less democratic than giving small societies more votes than the proportion of their membership compared with the great unions? There was also the important consideration of financial responsibility. Moreover, as the action of several unions in

sending delegations of about 40 members to the 1891 Congress had demonstrated, the existing situation had become farcical. And, naturally, unions had begun to look askance at the huge annual item of wasteful expenditure on delegates' expenses which had become necessary if their interests in the Congresses were to be safeguarded.

The outcry over the method the Committee had adopted in making their coup quickly died down, amidst almost complete agreement that their reorganisation of the Congresses was amply justified. (31)

What is the explanation for Burns's part in the incident? One suggestion often made is that he was actuated by his deep-seated hatred of Hardie. Undoubtedly this animosity was very bitter and probably lent zest to the blow Burns inflicted on his rival. By his part in the coup d'état he also helped to exclude himself from the Congresses, and it has generally been argued that only perverted jealousy of the ILP, heightened by his extraordinary vanity, could have driven him to clip his own wings in this way. (32) But no-one who knew Burns has ever accused him of lack of integrity - he was more than capable of sacrificing a personal advantage; and the ILP showed little sign as yet of growing into a force worthy of his jealousy. (Nor, in fact,

31. Tillet's contribution to the debate, mentioned above, is, of course, one of the many unexpected examples.

32. E.G. J. Burgess: John Burns, xiv (Hyndman's preface).

as his attendances had not been very regular, did he seem to place much value upon his position in the Congresses: his main interests were elsewhere). The facts are not so simple: there is a better explanation. Burns's distaste for the ILP was not simply a matter of personal jealousy of Hardie. Even apart from his inordinate conceit, which Mawdsley doubtless played upon in winning him over, Burns would have been an easy convert to the "old" party in any case. More even than most men Burns had a dualism in his character, and there had always been a pronounced element of "old unionism" in his make-up.

His main defect was one which he shared with the "old" party - a lack of vision. Little interested in political theory, he was always the "practical" man, coarse-fibred, unintellectual, concerned almost entirely with short-term results. Even in his early speeches as a socialist his gift for a dramatic phrase, his tremendous virility and physical courage, and his love for the limelight had disguised an essential conservatism. One finds him rushing quickly through the generalities, without contributing to the hackneyed party phrases any of the original turns of thought that Tom Mann or even Ben Tillett were capable of, and which shone through almost every sentence of Hardie's, hurrying as soon as possible to the immediate issue - what is to be achieved the next day, or the next year. His appeal is always to earthy commonsense. Many observers, the Webbs

included, were impressed by his moderation and reasonableness in council, which seemed to bely his platform manner and public record. (33) Of all the leaders in the great strike of 1889 he had been the first to be ready to compromise - much to Tillet's resentment.

In 1890 he told the SDF that he now intended to confine his socialist propaganda to the Eight Hours Bill. (34) In 1893, in a speech at Battersea, he listed a series of immediate reforms and told his audience: "That is socialism for today, and not for future centuries." (35) Although he himself never realised this, he was a collectivist rather than a socialist, and it was for this reason, as well as from lack of experience, that he had misinterpreted the collectivist resolutions of the 1890 TUC as a socialist victory. And, as Howell had pointed out, it was from lack of experience and understanding that he had criticised the "old" unions. It was little more than his temperament and background that kept him apart from the "old" leaders. He had soon wearied of Hyndman's antics. Even in his period as a leading agitator in 1885-91, half his work had been for the London Radicals, with whom he always kept up a congenial connection.

Because of his preoccupation with immediate gains, Burns could never see the point of backing a losing cause. When Tillet was first trying to organise the dockers he had poured

33. B. Webb: Our Partnership, 39. See also Smith & Nash: The Story of the Dockers' Strike, 142-3.

34. D. Lowe: Souvenirs of Scottish Labour, 44.

35. A. Metin: Le Socialisme en Angleterre, 266.

scorn on his efforts, on the "old unionist" ground that the dockers were "unorganisable"; but when he hurried to the docks in August 1889 and sensed that drama was approaching, he thrust himself upon Tillet - to Tillet's great good fortune.⁽³⁶⁾ One of his later critics even alleged that with a little more experience of strikes he became an adept at waiting in the background until he saw the direction of the current, throwing himself into the contest only if there was some sort of victory to be won. If he miscalculated - as in the case of the Scottish railway strike of 1891 - and the result was failure, he poured vituperation on the heads of his luckless adopted colleagues.⁽³⁷⁾ When in 1890 he was invited to stand as a parliamentary candidate for Dundee he first insisted that all the Labour organisations in the area should guarantee their support, and when there was difficulty in obtaining this, turned instead to Battersea, where he had the backing of the Liberals.⁽³⁸⁾ His stress was always upon achievement and success, his most bitter castigation always reserved for failure.

Lacking Hardie's insight, he was embittered against the ILP mainly because he could see only its apparent futility. While Hardie had just lost his seat in the Commons, and of its 28 candidates the ILP had not returned a single one, he himself

36. Burgess, 107 ff.

37. Ibid., 109 ff.

38. Lowe, 36-7; Burgess, 115-9.

was still in the House - who then was achieving something for Labour in Parliament? In the Commons he had refused to help Hardie in his famous attack on the vote of sympathy to the Royal family: it would only alienate the Liberals, and what immediate good would it effect? "I did not go to Parliament," he declared, "to be a political pantaloon". Moreover, Hardie was splitting the Labour movement - a grave offence to the "practical" politician. (Nevertheless, in typical Lib.-Lab. fashion, he claimed he had voted against the government more often than Hardie). (39)

As a practical man and an extrovert, shallower and less sensitive and burningly class-conscious than Hardie, Burns accepted more of the attitudes about him. He tended to pride himself on bourgeois virtues, and was eventually to enjoy the trappings of office - his Privy Councillor's court dress (40) - as Hardie could never have done. He resented Hardie's working-class showmanship - the cloth cap - and could not appreciate its great value. His own famous uniform, the artisan's white shirt and bowler, had always been rather out of place on the soap-box. He was in Parliament, not to use it as a sounding-box for class propoganda, but to do "useful" work for the workers. Already for three years he had been busying himself with the Progressives on the London County Council at a host of

39. Burgess, 186.

40. Ibid., 199.

piecemeal reforms: direct employment of municipal labour, the insertion of "fair wage" clauses in Council contracts, housing improvement. For all his bluster, he was a follower rather than a leader, hardly capable of forming a party of his own. Rarely contributing anything constructive to a debate - unless, as was several times alleged against him, he filched an idea from someone else - he was not the man to formulate the *raison d'être* for a party.

In effect, although he sincerely believed himself a socialist, Burns was already a Lib-Lab., and would probably have been ready in 1895 to accept office under the Liberals. (The fact that Burns could be a Lib-Lab is a further testimony to the independence of that much-maligned group). His use of the term "independence" had always been in the ambiguous "old unionist" sense. As early as 1891 he had showed signs of calling a halt to the "new unionist" campaign in the TUCs: in his speech on the 1891 Congress (less publicised than his similar 1890 "Report") he warned the "new" party of the danger that the Congresses might be abolished, and continued:

"Now we have got to be careful with this, that we don't irritate the moderate men who are slowly coming our way, but let us for a year or so try to mark time rather than alienate the rank and file who are rebelling against their reactionary working-men leaders." (41)

His personal brand of socialism was rather far from orthodox,

and in fact seemed to approach Liberalism: in reply to a complaint about his failure to support Hardie in the Commons in his fight for the unemployed, he retorted that

"There were men who were under the impression that a Labour member ought to be a sort of industrial godmother sticking the teat of a feeding bottle into the mouth of every loafer day and night." (42)

On another occasion he had declared:

"...as a Socialist, I am as I ever have been, against labour colonies, municipal workshops, and such economic nostrums as find favour with the fledgling economists of the SDF and embryonic statesmen of the ILP." (43)

And again, after the ILP's debacle in 1895:

"The unemployed have better friends who intend by less showy methods to do all that is possible, as hitherto, to palliate and remedy their condition." (44)

And in 1902 he was to write:

"Making every allowance for environment affecting will and conduct, there are thousands of homes in London which are dirty because the dwellers are drunken, filthy because their tenants are as lazy as the landlords are exacting. It is not always the pig-stye; it is sometimes - yea, too often - the pig....." (45)

And this was despite the fact that when he resigned from the Cabinet at the outbreak of war in 1914 he thought he did so as a socialist (although it was, significantly, the last of the Gladstonian Whigs, Morley, whom he accompanied from office).

And also that in 1918, discussing the reformed Labour Party, converted at last in that year to a coherent socialist programme,

42. W. Kent: John Burns - Labour's Lost Leader, 143.

43. Burgess, 187.

44. Ibid., 194.

45. Reformers' Year Book (Labour Annual) 1902, 19.

he told G.D.H. Cole that it had all been done on the wrong lines, and that what was wanted was a "straight" socialist party, with no hint at compromise -- "Hyndman's stuff, my boy, without the frills, and I'm the man to lead them". (46)

And what of Hardie's colleagues in the ILP, whom Burns had denounced in 1893 as "bogus" Labour men? Was there not in fact a considerable number of middle-class intellectuals among them with a prominent sprinkling of faddists -- free-love advocates, communist colonists, food and dress reformers, currency cranks, and so on?⁽⁴⁷⁾ The "old unionists" had been quick to notice the fact, which formed their main charge against the new Party, and it was hardly surprising that Burns should repeat the jibe, especially since it bore such a considerable element of truth.

In fact, returning to consideration of the 1895 Congress, one finds that some of the very points Burns had made against the ILP were repeated by the president in his bitter opening address. He castigated the ILP as not at all representative of the Labour movement -- which was certainly true in a general sense: who subscribed the money, he asked -- it was certainly not the unions? Further, in deploring the defeat of a long list of Liberal-Labour M.P.s he cast a good deal of the blame upon Hardie and his party, on the very grounds that not only

46. G.D.H. Cole: John Burns, 5.

47. The best evidence of this fact is a glance at the Labour Annals, particularly at the biographies.

had they split the ranks but their advocacy of utopian schemes had also seriously discredited the rest of the Labour movement. Their worst offence, however, had been their hopeless failure:

"Whatever good intentions the members of (the ILP) had harboured, the outcome of their hopeless electioneering campaign was to undermine some candidates most in sympathy with the demands of these Congresses, to cover themselves with the discredit of overwhelming defeat, to convert the term 'labour' candidate into a by-word of reproach and mistrust, and finally to unmistakably demonstrate that the worst enemies of the advancement of labour 'might be those of their own household'."

Analysing the results, he showed that the 28 ILP men had polled an average of only one of every fourteen votes in the constituencies they had fought:

"Hopeless candidacies were worse than useless; they were mischievous, they exhibited weakness, and earned antipathy and discredit to the cause they set out to benefit."

He called upon the delegates to devote their attention to "practical" questions. (48)

And it was Burns and not Hardie who had the ear of the Congress. In the discussion on the Parliamentary Committee's report, Hardie charged the Committee with having done nothing to further the "nationalisation of the means of production and distribution" as directed in his motion of the previous year; when Burns responded with a torrent of abuse, he was rewarded with loud applause. Amid his flood of invective, he made one point to some effect: he pleaded that the Committee could

hardly have been expected to accomplish the social resolution by sponsoring a bill to nationalise all industry at one swift stroke! (49)

Why were the "old" unionists so bitter in their opposition to the "new" party in the Congresses? It is hardly necessary to make a systematic answer here - much of the material has already been presented in the arguments they employed in countering the "new" section in the debates - but two points can be emphasised.

Firstly, in their political theory the "old" party were surprisingly close to the outlook of the "new". For instance at the 1896 Congress Fenwick, apparently in all sincerity, went so far as to ask the socialists to define their position more clearly in order to discover whether there was in fact any essential difference. He asked them

"whether they intended to accomplish their object by honest and straightforward means or otherwise. If they meant to honestly pay 20/- for £1 worth of goods - then there could be no very serious opposition to such a proposal (as nationalisation). But if they meant by a high-handed spoliation and confiscation to take from the people that which had been honestly earned and worked for by the people - then the religious and moral sense of the people would rise in repudiation and condemnation of their tactics."

(The socialists, of course, would object that accumulated capital had not been "honestly earned and worked for", but this seems a point of detail). But, charging the socialists with imagining

they had solved social problems as soon as they had expressed them in striking phrases, he deprecated their "empty-sounding phraseology" and asked for "some tangible scheme":

"Let them be told plainly and honestly what was meant by the nationalisation of the means of production and exchange; give them some tangible scheme, and they would go with them as far as it was possible for honest and moral-minded men to go."

Yet this was despite the argument Curran had just presented that there was no point in discussing specific methods, since all that the socialists sought was "the expression of a principle". Nationalisation - he had explained in typical ILP fashion - was merely the symbol of a belief in the impossibility of reconciling the interests of workers and employers, an impossibility which implied the absolute inadequacy of "the competitive society". (50)

Similarly, in his presidential address of 1891 Thomas Burt, a deeply confirmed Liberal admired by both parties, had tried to strike a balance between the two schools of thought:

"Demand and supply is a factor, and at your peril you forget that! But we have taught them that men are something more than machines..." (51)

And the president for the following year, John Hodge, avowedly a Liberal at that time and never in reality - although later he was to be an ILP candidate - anything else, had summed up

socialism in not unfriendly fashion:

50. 1896 TUC Report, 44-6.

51. 1891 TUC Report, 33.

"Much is said and written nowadays on the subject of socialism. Many of their ideas, while theoretically right, are at present unattainable." (52)

Certainly, as has been seen, the "old" unionists had become convinced since about 1885 that something must be done to remedy the condition of the poorest section of the community. They had accepted the problem as their own, (53) and had used it in fact as one of the main justifications for their very real desire for greatly increased and more independent political representation. Even if this concern for the poorest classes could be dismissed as mainly rationalisation and propaganda, they had always in fact been far from satisfied with the existing economic system. Although their opposition to socialism since about 1887 had given the appearance of reaction on this issue of their general position in politics, it had not really meant that they were now content with what they could obtain from the Liberals. Surely in fact the question to ask of the

52. 1892 TUC Report, 28.

53. To the evidence on this point might perhaps be added Broadhurst's speech to the 1890 Congress on his retirement from the secretaryship: "No man with a human heart can look upon the surroundings in our large cities of wretchedness, poverty and depravity without being moved to the depth of his soul for guidance and direction as to the best means to elevate his fellow creatures. May that be the work, and the successful work of this Congress, and all connected with it." (Report, 55) But Broadhurst was too practised a politician and the peroration is managed rather too smoothly! Some of the "old" unionists did accept individualism as a political philosophy, but they seem to me to have been in a minority.

British Labour movement in the nineties is not the usual one: "Why and how did the movement for independence in politics appear?" but its obverse: "Why was the independent movement so persistently and successfully resisted?"

In short, the answer is that the difference between the opposing parties was mainly one of political tactics. The "new" party thought it best to break completely with the Liberals; the "old" thought not. The "new" party were deliberately vague about their socialism, stressing that it was little more than a symbol of their distrust of the Liberals; the "old", who were themselves collectivists in much of their practice and approved of the values and principles of socialism, thought it unnecessarily alarming to be so insistent upon an objective that was so remote. Nor did they regard their acceptance of socialist values as in any way incompatible with their preference for working, temporarily but by no means subserviently, with the Liberals. And for the moment loss of the traditional Liberal sympathy, meagre though it was in its fruits, would place them under a tactical handicap that seemed overwhelming. This was the point that really mattered. Even with Radical support, it was rarely indeed that they could return a worker to Parliament.

The second, equally important aspect of the "old unionist" opposition is that, with some justification, they regarded the

"new" party as scarcely being trade unionists at all. At the 1891 Congress Maudsley had accused the "new" men of basing all their appeals upon "flights of fancy" and "flowery language", and in an unguarded moment had declared that a number of them were "driving ignorant mobs." (54) (As was seen in an earlier chapter, this was hardly an unfair description of some of the "new" unions at that time, although to state that their leaders were "driving" them was far from just.) Long before 1895, certainly, most of the leaders of the unskilled workers had become scarcely distinguishable in outlook from the craft secretaries. Responsibility and experience had sobered them. But the charge of vague emotionalism remained only too true of many of the "advanced" party who had been taking up so much of the time at the Congresses.

54. 1891 TUC Report, 48.

(b). 1895-1899.

What was the effect of the "purge"? Did it make any very appreciable difference to the decisions of subsequent Congresses?

In 1895, once the new standing orders had been approved and the general business taken, the general tone, though noticeably altered, was not as reactionary as might have been expected. For instance the eight hours bill resolution, moved by Thorne, was carried decisively by 625,000-222,000. (1) Distaste for Hardie's socialism apparently had little influence on this issue. And when Thorne also asked for a "completely democratic" education system - not "out of harmony with the economic forces which are working towards collectivism" - this resolution too was carried. (2) Tillet lost his seat on the Parliamentary Committee, but Thorne - as an SDF man a more rigid socialist than Hardie, but at the head of a strong union - was again successful. (3) Apparently there was a considerable body of advanced opinion even among those who were genuine trade unionists.

In 1896 the general trend of the decisions was similar. Although a resolution was carried approving the objective of nationalisation of mines, railways, land and

-
1. 1895 TUC Report, 43.
 2. Ibid., 55.
 3. Ibid.

public utilities, this was meant to amend the 1894 resolution for complete socialisation and thus its adoption represented a defeat for the socialists. It was carried 172-47. (4) The inclusion of public utilities, however, did appear to concede some ground to the advanced section - evidently the "old" unionists were finding it necessary to woo the "floating" voter in the Congresses, and judged him a collectivist. (Nevertheless the principle of the amended objective, being apparently the control of monopoly, could be said to be Radical rather than socialist.) Further, a proposal that a ballot of the unions be taken on the question of a levy of a penny each quarter for political candidates "pledged to neither of the old political parties - Tory or Liberal" was defeated 136-62, the old objection that this would retard the concession of payment of Members of Parliament again being raised. (5) But in any case this suggestion had never appeared to be growing in favour even before 1895. In the same session, however, a resolution for old age pensions for all workers was carried unanimously despite Knight's warning that it seemed dangerously paternalistic. (6) On the other hand, although the Gasworkers' request for a "more democratic education system" was again

4. 1896 TUC Report, 44-6.

5. Ibid., 50.

6. Ibid.

supported, the section referring to "harmony with the economic forces which are working towards collectivism" was deleted on the initiative of the Vellum Binders, who suggested that it would be more likely to obtain sympathy if less provocatively worded. (7)

It appeared, therefore, that there remained a large section of the Congress delegates who were attracted by advanced resolutions, particularly when specific proposals - such as old age pensions - were being considered. The movement towards more determined and extensive political action, which in any case had been a fairly gradual and natural development from earlier attitudes, had scarcely been checked. And this was the more significant since it was now more difficult to allege that the movement was only an artificial growth fostered by delegates who were not genuine trade unionists.

The next year, 1897, the "new" party appeared to win increased support on general political issues. But they were as far as ever from obtaining practical help in the form of a political fund. Although the eight hours motion, now well established as a "hardy annual" and introduced this year by Thorne, was worded with a particularly socialist stress on

this occasion, the eight hour day being described as "one of the most important preliminary steps towards the ultimate emancipation of the working-class" - it was carried by no fewer than 923,000 votes to 141,000 on the card system. (8) Similarly a resolution calling for the abolition of the "half-time" system of child labour, a measure which the ILP had recently made one of its main planks and which was popular in Yorkshire but determinedly opposed by the Lancashire textile unions, was carried 595,000 - 274,000, compared with 394,000 - 353,000 the previous year. (9) The miners, however, had abstained from voting. And the nationalisation resolution, uncompromisingly worded to include "the whole of the means of production, distribution and exchange" and also specifically instructing "the Parliamentary Committee to promote and support legislation with that object in view", was carried by an overwhelming majority, although again the miners abstained. (10) On the other hand, a motion that a political fund for independent candidates be instituted was just as heavily rejected. Again it was discussed by some of the delegates as an alternative to the state payment of Members of Parliament. (11)

8. 1897 TUC Report, 32.

9. Ibid., 41.

10. Ibid., 54.

11. Ibid., 53.

Although a large section of the delegates were apparently ready to give lip service to socialism as an ultimate objective, up till this time, they seemed to see no incompatibility between this attitude and their existing relationship with the Liberals. At all events they apparently thought it preferable for tactical reasons to remain as a group on the fringe of the Liberal Party rather than completely break with the Liberals and make a determined effort to set up a party of their own.

The following Congress, in 1898, marks an important watershed in Labour history. From this year onwards the tone of the Congresses undergoes a clearly-marked change. There is a new urgency, a new resolution. The delegates' whole conception of the place of trade unionism within the community seems to have altered: there is a new, much more wide-spread consciousness of a need to forge new weapons. The new temper was to become still more marked after the Lords upheld the Taff Vale judgment in 1903; and on the other hand can be viewed to a certain extent as a further stage in the gradual growth of discontent that traces back to about 1885 and even, beyond the depression years, to the seventies. But a sudden and striking acceleration is clearly discernible from 1898, and owed very little to "new unionist" or ILP propaganda.

What had brought about this crucial heightening of temper? As has been demonstrated in previous chapters, a whole complex of forces, economic, social, and political, and in the sphere of political thought, had been at work, but until this watershed their effect had been rather limited. The new and deciding factor was a sudden loss of confidence on the part of the "old" unionists in the adequacy of their industrial strength. Until this time they had relied primarily upon their bargaining power in industry: while they had regarded political activity as a very useful adjunct and had become prepared, as in the case of the eight hours bill, to try to wring an occasional overtly collectivist measure from the Liberals when it suited them, they had looked upon political activity as being quite secondary in importance. Political influence was necessary to safeguard their interests, but for actual gains within the economy and the preservation of their living standards they looked primarily to their industrial functions. Although far from satisfied with their treatment at the hands of the Liberals, they had thought it unwise to alienate them by forming a completely separate Labour party. Thus they had tended to dismiss political philosophies as being beyond their range of interests. As it would obviously be many years before they could win the

Parliamentary machine for their own use, their more immediate consideration had been fear that it might be used against them for hostile purposes.

Since the whole of this pattern of attitudes had rested upon confidence in their industrial strength, it had been the weaker unions, particularly the impoverished and unstable "new" unions of the unskilled, that had deviated furthest from "old unionist" orthodoxy. Although disquieted and growing continually more impatient, the majority had remained reasonably self-assured. The blow that had fallen in 1897 to shatter all this confidence had been the crushing defeat inflicted upon the Amalgamated Society of Engineers.

In the years immediately preceding, other societies too had been decisively beaten in strikes or lock-outs - the Scottish railwaymen in 1891⁽¹²⁾, the miners in 1893, the Lancashire textile operatives in 1893 - and, as will be remembered, the immediate origin of the ILP had been, as much as anything else, the defeat of the Manningham Strike in 1892. But the engineers' defeat was crucial, for the ASE had an immense prestige. It was still the model, the highest development of unionism. If the ASE cannot stand by itself,

12. G. W. Alcock: *Fifty Years of Railway Trades Unionism*, 245, states that the defeat of the Scottish railwaymen greatly stimulated the growing feeling in the North in favour of political action.

the other unions asked themselves (as will be seen when they are considered separately in the next chapter), what chance have we? The lesson was additionally impressive since for some years the unions had been growing more aggressive in temper, eager for some marked improvement in their conditions, more particularly the eight hour day. The "old unionist" retort to the protagonists of legislative "interference" that they could obtain this boon and others as soon as they were sufficiently well organised suddenly lost most of its force. Moreover, the lock-out had originated in a dispute over the introduction of machinery, the spectre which the "new" party had so often stressed as the great menace to the "old" type of unionism, and its second main issue had been this very claim for the eight hours.

What remedies were available to reinforce their strength? Three were suggested: the institution by the state of compulsory arbitration boards; the combination of the unions into one great federation; or the creation of a political party that would make the trade union interest a major force in Parliament.

As it meant giving over their most important freedom to the state, which they had always regarded - and always would regard - with suspicion, the first suggestion was never very seriously considered. As long ago as 1891 state-

sponsored arbitration had had a champion in Tillett, who (as has been seen) had publicised the project in his union journal and had brought forward the proposal at the Congress of that year. Arousing little interest, it had been rejected during the rush of the last session. (13) On his return from his voyage in 1893-4 to Australia and New Zealand, where he had seen the system in operation, Tillett was even more enthusiastic. (Apparently he failed to realise - although on the other hand, considering the weakness of the Dockers' Union, this may well have been its main attraction for him - that in those colonies the boards were a device to give artificial strength to the unions, which in those sparsely populated countries possessed little bargaining power of their own. Mann, who also visited these colonies shortly afterwards, strongly condemned the system.) The proposal was still given little attention, however, except in some union journals. When in 1899 Tillett brought it again before the TUC, it was rejected 62-131; nevertheless he was to make further attempts to secure its adoption in following years, almost succeeding in 1906. (14)

In this crisis of the nineties, however, practically all attention turned to the other two possible remedies.

13. 1891 TUC Report, 88.

14. 1899 TUC Report, 73; R.C.K. Ensor: Modern Socialism, xlii-xlii.

Although they were not by any means seen as alternatives, it was the suggested general federation of unions that was first to receive the main consideration. It was immediately discussed with great interest in the trade union journals and papers. One reason -- although far from being the only one -- why political action did not receive more attention at this stage was probably that the IIP took no initiative, being apparently still concerned with the danger that the trade union support they coveted might subject them to the control of the Congresses.

As was mentioned in discussing the 1893 Congress, the suggestion of a federation had often been raised among the unions since the seventies. It had been revived that year by the unskilled workers largely because they had come to recognise their weakness, and more specifically as a result of the destruction of their project of a Shipping Trades Federation by the concerted attack of the shipowners. (15) It had then been discussed in various forms at succeeding Congresses, without much progress being made. At first the craft unions had tended to treat it as a device solely concerning the unskilled workers -- an attitude they adopted the more readily from fear of being involved in the irresponsibilities of this group. In fact the whole problem

of drawing up an equitable constitution for a federation embracing a wide variety of occupations and including large and small unions was so difficult as to be almost impossible to solve. There seemed to be no practicable arrangement which would allow each body sufficient initiative without giving it freedom to drag the whole federation into unnecessary and dangerous conflicts, while at the same time ensuring that each union would receive a just and worth-while return for the expense of membership in the event of its being involved in a legitimate strike.

When a constitution had at last been drafted and presented to the Congress of 1895, these difficulties had been avoided rather than solved. The federation proposed on that occasion had been very loosely organised, the member unions having no specific obligations but undertaking merely to render whatever mutual assistance they thought advisable in each particular case. The main functions of this body would in fact have been mediation and conciliation. But this of course was not what the interested unions had really wanted: they had been trying to obtain the guarantee of worth-while financial support in contests with their employers. (16)

Thus the project had been banded about for two more

16. 1895 TUC Report, 64-9.

Congresses, the "new" unions continuing to press for some more ambitious plan, while the craft unions remained little interested. In 1897 the General Railway Workers and the

NAUL had obtained the election of a special committee,

consisting of one member each from most of the main occupations, which was instructed to take some definite

step in the matter within a year. (17) It proceeded to draw

up a scheme, but meanwhile P. J. King, the founder of the

Chemical Workers' Union (and a former associate of

T. P. O'Connor in his work in Ireland), drew up an elaborate

constitution which was vigorously publicised by the Clarion

and received extensive support. As interest became

intensified in 1898 following the ASE defeat, King held public

meetings throughout the country where his scheme was debated

and compared with the committee's proposals. Both had their

drawbacks, but the Clarion campaign aroused greater support

for King's plan in the areas where that paper had its following.

It was generally agreed that the whole question of the

federation should be thrashed out and some definite step

taken at the 1898 TUC.

The resulting atmosphere of intense interest is clearly

discernible in the report of the Congress, repeated allusions

to the federation being made during the opening formalities.

It was the topic that came to the surface in all discussion, the centre of all interest. A considerable section of the order paper consisted of remits on this one subject, most of them stressing the point that the strike-benefits must be adequate. In his opening address, the President remarked on the stimulus that the engineers' defeat had given to the movement for more vigorous political action and declared that a political fund was necessary to achieve "industrial emancipation", but he gave at least as much stress to the purely industrial field:

"If trade unionism is to be the power in the future that it has been in the past it will not be by the old methods of defence and attack, but by perfecting our organisations and welding them into a solid unity..."(18)

Thus the stage was set.

But the drama was postponed. The night before the debate on the proposed federations was to take place, the hall in which the Congress was being held was burned to the ground, most of the delegates' papers being destroyed. Although another hall was obtained and the sessions continued, the long-awaited debate petered out within two hours, much to the general surprise. All that was achieved was a decision to call a special conference at a later date of those unions which wished to institute a federation.(19) In their reports

18. 1898 TUC Report, 32.

19. Ibid., 54.

to their societies when they returned from the Congress, several of the delegates give the rather puzzled explanation that the fire had so unsettled the members of the Congress as to make proper debate impossible.

Curiously, despite the President's pointer and the drawing of similar morals in several of the union journals, there had been no remits or discussion at this Congress on the subject of political action or a parliamentary fund. (Nevertheless the socialist general objective was carried again at a later session, for the first time since 1894.)⁽²⁰⁾ Part of the reason for this was almost undoubtedly the ILP's fear of falling under the direction of the Congresses, heightened now by the fact that the possibility of instituting a fund had become considerably less remote; but the main explanation seems to be that following the ASE's defeat the first thought of the unionists was to find an industrial remedy.

When held later in the year, the projected special conference did at last bring the General Federation of Trade Unions into existence. But its debates had served mainly to emphasise how insuperable were the difficulties. Provision was made for two grades of affiliation, member unions contributing either 3d. or 6d. a quarter for each member, receiving in return either 2s. 6d. or 5s. a week when engaged

20. 1898 TUC Report, 70.

in a strike or lock-out. But there were many safe-guarding conditions to be complied with before these payments could be claimed; and, as these rates would do no more than supplement normal strike-pay, it was obvious that the unions would still have to rely mainly on their own resources. (21) Moreover it was soon known that the miners, self-centred as usual, and the Lancashire textile unions would not affiliate, and that some of the other unions, such as the ASE, would take many months to come to a decision. Interest turned rapidly to the political field.

All the expectancy of the previous year was now repeated: there was the same buzz of discussion in union journals, the same atmosphere of anticipation when the 1899 Congress opened. Once again the hints of a momentous new development cropped up repeatedly in the preliminaries, and again there were a number of similar remits from various bodies on the same subject. But this year it was a definite and earnest step towards increased Labour representation that was anticipated. And by this time the ILP had solved their problem. Between them Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald had drawn up a shrewdly-devised resolution which they thought would enable them, when followed up by judicious manipulation, to obtain trade union support without sacrificing too much of

21. Report of Special Conference, generally among Parliamentary Committee's papers, bound with 1899 TUC Report.

their control of policy. (In fact the ILP were surprisingly confident of the outcome of the approaching Congress: in its report to the Annual Conference - held as early as January, nine months before the TUC was to meet - the National Administrative Council, after referring to the re-adoption of the socialist objective at the 1898 Congress, hinted: "... and there is good reason for believing that the next Congress will witness a more startling development still.") (22)

When the time came for the crucial debate, the first suggestion to be considered was a remit from the London Waiters' Union. This proposed that a Parliamentary Fund administered by the Parliamentary Committee and amassed by means of a levy of a halfpenny a year from each union member be instituted, and that societies refusing to contribute should be excluded from the Congresses. But this was not what was wanted: Thorne rose at once to move the previous question, and this remit was quickly thrust out of the way. (23) Thus the path was cleared for the ILP proposal, which was presented by an ASRS delegate, although similar but more crudely-phrased remits were also on the order paper from the National Dockers and the Boot and Shoe Operatives. The ASRS version read as follows:

"That this Congress, having regard to its decisions in former years, and with a view to securing a better representation of the interests of Labour in the House

22. Report of ILP Annual Conference, 1899, 10.

23. 1899 TUC Report, 62.

of Commons, hereby instructs the Parliamentary Committee to invite the co-operation of all the co-operators, socialists, trade unions and other working-class organisations to jointly co-operate on lines mutually agreed upon, in convening a special conference of representatives from such of the above-named organisations as may be willing to take part to devise ways and means for securing the return of an increased number of Labour members to the next Parliament." (24)

An extended debate was held, a long succession of speakers urging support of the motion. There was little opposition. A speaker from the Miners' Federation was strongly against the proposal, and some others urged that there was no real need for it, as quite a number of unions were taking action for themselves. The attitude of the "old unionist" section was probably expressed fairly accurately by Thomas Ashton of the Amalgamated Spinners when, without raising much positive objection, he urged that they cease wasting Congress time on the matter and pass to something of more practical and immediate importance. This sort of discussion, he protested, had been taking place year after year without benefit to any trade - if the resolution were passed, not one unionist in 10,000 would take any notice of it in any case.

There was a good deal of truth in this statement of the position. On the experience of past years, Ashton was probably right: only a section of the delegates had been interested in these questions, yet they had long been

occupying a great deal of Congress time, to the exclusion of other important matters. A large proportion of the delegates had regarded them as having no real bearing upon trade unionism, and had refrained from voting upon them. Even at that Congress of 1899 his judgment may not have been badly wrong. If the reaction of their unions after the LRC was formed is any indication, it would seem that a large section of the delegates were not greatly interested. Moreover, it is possible that many had little realisation of what the resolution would lead to. (Curiously, this is despite the clear, dramatic change of tone on the question of political action in such union journals as that of the ASE and the remarkable sudden new confidence of the ILP - apparently, and this impression is confirmed by a study of union documents, many of the more conservative unions, especially the textile operatives and the miners, lived in a world of their own.) And after all, of course, the resolution said nothing of financial support. Many of the less interested delegates were doubtless prepared to follow Congress precedent and give a half-hearted blessing to a separate conference of those bodies which were strongly interested where these could settle the matter among themselves. They were giving nothing away, committing themselves to nothing - surely no

great harm could result, and possibly some innovation of some ultimate value to themselves might eventuate. As many of the unions were already taking separate action, perhaps this conference would enable them to co-ordinate their efforts to some advantage.

All this discussion of the delegates' attitudes is of course very conjectural. It is impossible to write with any certainty on the point. One indication that the delegates may have known rather well what they were doing is the fact that such a large proportion actually voted on the question. Although, since there were 1,200,000 unionists represented at the Congress and about a million card votes were cast, the representatives of more than 200,000 (more than the favourable majority) did abstain, the proportion was much larger than usually participated on such resolutions as those for the adoption of the socialist general objective.

If, as seems probable, Ashton assumed that this was to be just another long debate that would end in a negative vote and leave nothing to show but wasted time, he certainly did make the mistake of underestimating the strength of the new current towards more positive action. Instead of being rejected, the resolution was carried by a small margin:

546,000 - 434,000. (25)

There was little other indication of any change of temper at the Congress. A proposal by Sexton that unionists be advised "only to vote for candidates who will support the industrial programme of the Congress at Manchester in 1895" - the special pre-election conference of the ILP in that year - was soundly defeated. (26) (Judging from its wording, this may have been intended as a version of the "Fourth Clause".) And although the resolution condemning the half-time system was again carried 587,000 - 171,000 and an amendment seeking to exclude its more emotional phrases was defeated 298,000-449,000, a large section of the delegates had abstained from voting. (27) As had been the case now for some years, Thorne was again near the head of the poll for the Parliamentary Committee, but all the best-known candidates from the "old" unions were also successful and the general tone of the Committee was as conservative as ever. Sexton had been unsuccessful, while Tillett was near the foot of the list of rejected candidates, having received only 51,000 votes, compared with 784,000 for Thorne. (28)

Although there had been a marked swing of opinion in many unions in favour of independent labour representation, there was little sign that this had been due to any conversion

26. 1899 TUC Report, 54.

27. Ibid., 71.

28. Ibid., 84.

of the unionists to a new point of view by socialist propaganda. The defeat of the ASE had been a much more potent influence. Nevertheless the fact that a majority of the TUC had agreed to associate with the socialist bodies, scorning the wrath of the Liberals, constituted something of a political revolution. (29)

-
29. It happened, of course, that the Liberals took up rather a conciliatory attitude. (The fact that they were in opposition in the Commons at this time probably contributed a good deal to this result). But this decision of the TUC contrasts very markedly with the bitterness towards the ILP of four years earlier.

CHAPTER 15.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MOVEMENT WITHIN
TWO "OLD" UNIONS.

The general course of the movement in the world of trade unionism leading to the formation of the Labour Representation Committee has now been considered: the purpose of this chapter will be to amplify this treatment by tracing this development within two of the separate unions. Once again this will not be a simple task, for the policy of every union is generally a complex mixture of general attitudes and particular reactions to special circumstances, often part-determined by tradition, and frequently tangled with contradictions. As the miners and unskilled workers have already been considered separately, the unions to be examined here have been selected from among the craft societies whose "conversion" from "old" unionism to "new" (the use of the term exaggerates the change that took place) is the most important part of the general movement. The two bodies to be considered are the Amalgamated Society of Engineers and the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives.

(a). The Amalgamated Society of Engineers.

Firstly, what were the industrial problems which this most highly regarded of the unions was facing in these years? Is there any feature of the development of the engineering industry in our period which helps to explain why it was that the ASE went over to the advanced party in the TUCs? The history of engineering in the last half of the nineteenth century is the story of uneven but steady change that continually increased the difficulty of the craftsman's position. Like most other trades, the engineers were facing the general intensification that was proceeding in British industry; and more than most others they had to grapple with the introduction of new methods and machinery, accompanied by a marked increase in the size of the average engineering firm. As their work became more mechanised and specialised, they were threatened more and more with the replacement of their abilities by semi-skilled labour. Their main problems, therefore, were to devise methods of protecting their interests under the piecework systems that were becoming the rule under the new specialisation of functions, and of incorporating the semi-skilled workers into the Society.

Yet the change that was taking place in engineering was less a general progressive adoption of better and still

better machinery than a gradual spreading throughout the industry of machines and methods that had been comparatively well-known at the start of the period. According to J. B. Jeffreys:

"The fitter and turner in an up-to-date shop of 1850 would have been quite at home in a shop of the 1890's, as described by one who served his time there at this latter date: '... lathes, planing, shaping, slotting and drilling machines were the whole of the equipment. ... Carbon steel tools alone were available and flat and forged drills.'"

The difference was largely that these tools had become more common and that the three-ton planer of the 50's had been replaced by the sixty-ton model of the 90's, with a smaller machine for light work. There were now five types of lathe instead of one. From Allan's testimony to the Royal Commission on Trade Unions of 1867, it is obvious that the development of mechanisation and specialisation had made a good deal of ground long before the 70's:

"Some twenty years ago when we had not so many machines introduced... men were considered to be better general workmen and could do, and did, different things where now they are confined to one or two branches."

But it still had a long way to go in the 90's. Accuracy rather than tolerance was still required in measurement - thus it was still not complete mass-production that was in operation: the micrometer was still not in general use, but the "fine sixty-fourth". Despite a large degree of

specialisation, a fair measure of skill was still often necessary. Advanced United States practice - the use of "mushed" steel for turning tools, milling machines, capstan and turret lathes, and so on - was just beginning to appear among a few of the more progressive firms. (1)

Moreover, despite the tendency to increasing scale, the number of small-sized firms actually increased. Each town of any size had one or more, often carrying out all kinds of work. According to Jeffreys:

"At no time did the workers in these small shops outnumber those employed in the larger units, nor did they counteract the general trend towards increase in size and specialisation, but they constituted an important feature of the industry, and greatly affected the problems of organisation and unification of both workers and employers." (2)

Thus the threat of replacement by semi-skilled labour remained not very urgent over a great part of the Society's field. Although the suggestion of lowering the qualifications for membership was being discussed as early as the beginning of the 80's and a start was made at the Delegate Meeting of 1885 by admitting men who were receiving the current rates of payment in their district - the Society's rate being usually about two shillings a week higher - it was still

under discussion and being strongly opposed as late as 1912. (3)

1. J. B. Jeffreys: the Story of the Engineers, *passim*, esp. 55-7.
2. *Ibid.*, 54.
3. For the 1885 amendment, see especially Monthly Report, June, 1889, 27.

On the other hand, the new specialisation aggravated several difficulties brought upon the Society by its increasing size. These problems were serious enough without this complication. The membership grew from 44,692 in 1880 to 53,740 in 1888 and 71,221 in 1891;(4) and a good deal of the Society's comparative ineffectiveness from about 1885 to 1892 must be attributed to the tremendous volume of work that was placed on the General Office by this increase. Submerged in day-to-day developments, the General Secretary and Council were quite unable to give a lead in working out a coherent up-to-date industrial policy adapted to the steady transformation of the industry. A further result of this marked expansion was to intensify the problem common to all large self-governing organisations - the difficulty of keeping the central direction in touch with the rank and file. And this was further aggravated for the Society by its strong tradition of centralisation.(5) As

-
4. There was a further rise to 91,444 by 1897. Part at least of this increase may have been due to the expansion of the industry: the numbers employed in the engineering and allied industries rose from 888,000 in 1881 to 1,119,000 in 1901. (1901 Census, Gen. Report, C VIII, 176-7).
 5. The ASE was often condemned by the "new" unionists on the ground that the General Council continually forbade aggressive action by the branches or districts, but in fact disagreement with the centre just as often took the opposite form. For example a strike at Bolton in 1887 was settled by the District Council on terms strongly

specialisation increased, various groups of members of particular crafts, such as pattern-makers, began to feel that the union was unable to give sufficient attention to their special interests. They therefore hived off into separate unions, creating the additional difficulty for the Society, which now tended to become a mere body of fitters and turners, that there was a movement towards "sectionalism" throughout the period, in direct opposition to its own principle of "amalgamation". Seventy-eight per cent of the admissions for 1865-9 were fitters and turners, eighty-five per cent for 1885-9. (6) And this disruptive tendency was emphasised by continual "demarkation" disputes.

In the early nineties, "new" unionists often charged the ASE with being timid in its industrial policy; and this charge has frequently been re-echoed by later writers and associated with "old unionist" reluctance to break the traditional ties with the liberals, as if these two tendencies were both symptoms of subservience to the capitalist ideology. But in fact the Society seems to have been at least moderately active once the depression began to recede in the second half

5. (Contd.) disapproved by the General Council (Monthly Report, Nov., 1887, 44-7). And there are many instances of branches being rebuked for acceptance of overtime or piecework contrary to General Office direction or the Society's rules. See Jeffreys, 108-110, for the overburdening of the General Office.
6. Jeffreys, 58-9; 104-6.

of the eighties. (It would have been difficult to be aggressive enough to satisfy the "new" men: the 1897 defeat was surely to justify the "old unionist" contention that just a certain point militancy could be sheer foolhardiness). In May, 1886, when there were still 7 percent of the members unemployed, John Burnett, who was then General Secretary, reported that "For defensive purposes we are entirely powerless, and all we can do is simply to pay out benefits to our members." As the funds were then down to £2. 2.10 a head, which was 17s. 2d. less than the rules prescribed, this was probably true enough. It would have been folly to try to resist the 2s. reduction that was being imposed everywhere at that time. (7) But by the early months of the following year when trade had begun to improve, the reduction was being regained, voluntarily in some cases, but often by means of strikes. There are frequent references to strikes in the Monthly Reports of this and subsequent years, several often being in progress simultaneously. In a specific reply to "new" unionist charges that the union had become a mere friendly benefit institution, it was pointed out in July, 1890, that the Society had disbursed no less than £86,000 for "trade" purposes over the previous three years. (8)

7. Monthly Report.

8. Monthly Report, 32. £11,446 was donated to other trades, 1886-92 (Jeffreys, 107), despite complaints that the "new" societies seemed to depend entirely on the "old". There had been large ASB strikes at Sunderland in 1883 and Bolton in 1887. (Jubilee Souvenir, 74, 75, 78).

In their political and economic conceptions, the leaders of the ASE in the late eighties seem, typically of the unionists of the day, to have been critical enough of the existing order, but wary of looking too often to legislative "interference" for remedies. In his 1887 Annual Report, for instance, Robert Austin, who had succeeded Burnett, suggested, "We have created large fortunes for others. Is it not time we began to produce something for ourselves?" and quoted part of the Society's objective, that "... we may be able to enjoy a fair portion of the fruit of our labours." But at the same time he replied to several branches which had already asked that a vote be taken on the eight hours question that the Council had not done so because many branches were still accepting overtime, which must first be abolished, and also because "we are averse to government intervention with adult male labour as to the number of hours we shall work each day." He continued: "As we obtained the nine hours per day without the aid of government, we think that we can obtain the eight hours when the proper time arrives." (9) As it was reported the following year that many branches had been clamouring for the Society to abolish its prohibition of overtime, apparently - although this may

be pressing logic too far - the members were not yet ready for the eight hours campaign. (It has already been mentioned that the Society had a specific rule prohibiting the acceptance of overtime work; another aspect of the question was that the reduction of two shillings a week had been accepted because of the slackness of trade, so that the Society could not admit any justification for overtime until this reduction was everywhere restored.) On the other hand Austin favoured the idea of obtaining the eight hour day by industrial action, and conceded that "... if we fail, we can, as a last resource, seek the aid of Parliament to enact a law of eight hours." (10) Apparently the issue was not altogether one of individualist principles!

Before Austin succeeded him, Burnett had been urging the members to "exercise more social and political influence". Although he meant by this phrase a greater measure of activity within the Liberal Party, it is surely significant that his plea was for an outlook less restricted to mere trade problems, and stressed the point that trade unionists had political interests. (11) Similarly Austin declared in September, 1888, that "... the difference between social and political questions is becoming, in our day, so shadowy as

10. Ibid., xiv.

11. Jeffreys, 107.

- 12. Monthly Report, 33.
- 13. Ibid., November, 1890, 29. The voting was 148 for the "voluntary" method, 46 for "legal action"; yet the TUC delegates were instructed to support the proposal for a bill.
- 14. Abstract Report of the Council's Proceedings, Jan. 1 - June 30, 1891, 93.

however, that the issue was seen as involving less a

union action" 6546-1251. (14) There were indications,

"legal" method, while they approved of the method of "trade

1295, but by 3275-4901 the members declared against the

favour of attempting to gain the eight hours day was 8149-

opinion, the response was little better. The voting in

early in 1891 to obtain a more satisfactory indication of

there was little interest. When a second ballot was held

fewer than 200 - bothered to participate. (13) Apparently

November of that year, only the merest handful of members -

the 1890 TUC. But when a vote was eventually taken in

in one of the monthly reports about the "Legalist" victory at

of indignant complaints at a deprecatory remark made by Austin

ballot on the eight hours question; and there were a number

against the attitude of the Council in refusing to take a

within the Society. After 1887 more branches protested

before the new ideas appeared to have gained much influence

when the "new unionist" movement began; and it was some time

This then was the position - rather a mixed one -

individualism.

to be indistinguishable." (12) Again, this was hardly economic

principle than a question of tactics: for instance the Hull branch expressed the view that "it would be dangerous to trust our liberty in the hands of capitalists such as represent us in the present Parliament." (15)

The next opportunity of measuring the influence of the "new" ideas occurred in January, 1892, when, following the death of Austin, Mann entered upon a campaign against John Anderson, the conservative Assistant Secretary, for the General Secretaryship. Nevertheless, although he took this action as a "new" unionist, with the object of stimulating the membership, his nomination was supported by an impressive list of "old" leaders, including Thomas Durr, R. Tait (Secretary of the Scottish Railway Servants), Edward Trow, (General Secretary of the Associated Iron and Steel Workers) and Robert Knight, and also a number of employers. (16) And there was little that was aggressively "new unionist" about his campaign. He disclaimed any intention of endeavouring to abolish friendly benefits, and stressed the soundness and caution he would bring to the administration of the Society's affairs. His plea for a more active trade policy and a wider interest in politics was very vaguely expressed. Nevertheless the voting, which favoured Anderson only by 18102-17152, was

15. *Ibid.*, 109.

(16) *Nomination Returns, Webb Collection.*

probably of some significance. Almost half of the membership - a record proportion - had taken part. (17)

Following the election came the 1892 Delegate Meeting at Leeds, where feeling ran high between the two factions. After no less than ten weeks of debate considerable changes were made in the constitution of the Society along the lines advocated by Mann and his party. The main alterations were in organisation; six full-time Organising District Delegates were instituted and the old Executive Council composed of working delegates from the London branches was replaced by a Council of full-time delegates elected by eight electoral districts. Thus in place of four full-time officials the Society now had seventeen. Although this improvement promised to bring much more life into the union by spreading the burden of routine work and bringing its central direction * much closer to the provinces, it can hardly be regarded as a "new unionist" reform - in fact it was probably copied from the organisation of the Boilermakers' Society, which was the ↓ most conservative of unions. In addition a Superannuation Reserve Fund was created in order to relieve the Society's general funds from the continual drain of benefit payments and thus render them more readily available for fighting purposes; full membership was opened to wider sections of

17. ASE Jubilee Souvenir, 85.

the industry, including machinemen, and two new sections were created in order to admit to partial membership men who were ineligible to become full members through infirmity, age, or inability to earn the Society rate of wages; the rigid piece-work rule of 1874 was abolished and power to permit and regulate piece-work was given to the District Committees; and the Council was given authority to raise funds for participation in national politics, provided that opinion in the Society had become favourable to this course and that they had first consulted the membership. (18)

Thus the way was cleared for more vigorous action. The alterations to the rules did not, however, represent or produce any change in the outlook of the mass of the members. Some of the new provisions hardly operated at all. Although £100 a year was granted to John Burns after his election to the Commons, no attempt was made for many years to utilise the machinery for political action; and the members made no effort to gain recruits for the new sections: as late as 1907, owing it was stated to the attitude of the rank and file, they still contained only 4,000 members. (19)

In the following years, in fact, the monthly reports show continued division within the Society. Intermingled with reports of speeches at various functions such as that

-
18. Report of 1892 Delegate Meeting; Jeffreys, 136-8.
 19. Annual Report, 1907, vii-viii.

of a Birmingham member who declared that "They wanted men in Parliament like Jack Burns" (20) are accounts of other occasions when ILP and "new unionist" policies were bitterly attacked, apparently with the strong approval of the audience. In 1894 Anderson gave evidence of this division by condemning

"any attempt to throttle the opinions of old tried and trusted branch and district officials for the unjustifiable reason that they refuse to forgo the convictions of a lifetime for something that, as yet, is imperfectly understood." (21)

He himself unashamedly continued his policy of caution. In his Annual Report for 1893 he stated that although there had been "provocation enough", a "policy of conciliation" had been adopted and trouble "carefully avoided - for obvious reasons". The "obvious reasons" were that the unemployment percentage was approaching the record level, but he averred that the employers' "unjustifiable demands" would not soon be forgotten. (22) He was gratified with the progress of the eight hours movement in the industry, a considerable number of firms having conceded the shorter day by this time, and particularly with one of its aspects:

"One pleasing feature of the present movement is that it is developing peaceably, and that we have not up to the present had to resort to means whereby friction of ill-feeling might be engendered." (23)

20. Monthly Report, June, 1893, 59.

21. Annual Report, 1894, xi.

22. Ibid., 1893, iii-iv.

23. Ibid., xvii.

There are many similar references. In 1894 he explained that

"the restraint we have been compelled to use at times has not been from want of sympathy with our members in their efforts to improve their position, so much as an earnest desire to prevent disputes, where our chances of success were doubtful."

Later experience was probably to justify this judgment.

Some of the credit for averting unnecessary trouble he ascribed to the institution of the new Organising District delegates. (24)

On the other hand Anderson was generous in his praise of Burns. He was mildly favourable to Labour representation, but not under Hardie's leadership - of the 1894 TUC he wrote:

"We sincerely hope that the result of this congress will be to make the Parliamentary Committee more of a permanent executive to control and direct a solid phalanx of labour in its political aspirations. And if there is to be a Labour party, let it be a party whose policy shall find expression in the bona-fide representatives of organised labour, and not be bossed by every crank who imagines himself a leader of men." (25)

The Society's delegates to the Congress had been instructed to vote in favour of the eight hours bill and a national political organisation under the control of the Parliamentary Committee; but had been given a free hand on other issues

24. Annual Report, 1894, xi.

25. Monthly Report, Sept., 1894, 60; see also *ibid.* Nov., 1893, 49.

because "some of the matters have no bearing on what may be termed the internal affairs of the Society", and because they had made their views known to the members when seeking election. Four delegates were sent - a reduction from the previous eight for reasons of economy. Burns was given 3,000 votes in one district compared with 200 for the next highest candidate, and Mann received 1742 in another, easily the highest vote but not an absolute majority. (26)

Perhaps Anderson was too conservative to be very representative. While Acting General Secretary on one occasion, William Brereton had expressed a stronger view. With reference to the miners' strike of 1893 he wrote:

"We earnestly appeal to every member to consider how far the existing laws of the country are responsible for this anarchy in the industrial world, and the advisability of sending working-men into the House of Commons to protect their interests,"

arguing that this would ultimately be less expensive and involve less hardship than reliance upon the strike weapon. (27)

But even in Anderson's writings there were traces enough of deep dissatisfaction and class feeling. Referring to a demonstration in protest against an amendment made by the Lords to the Employers' Liability Bill, he complained:

"'Twas ever thus! Nothing in the shape of an Act of Parliament for the benefit of Labour was ever obtained without demonstration and persistent agitation, and

26. Ibid., Oct., 1894, 58.

27. Ibid., Sept. 1893, 50.

yet we are told that all Labour leaders are agitators and common disturbers ... Railway directors are not very numerous, but they wield a tremendous power when they mean business." (28)

And in reply to an objection raised by the employers that the eight hour day would reduce earnings he retorted that earnings were not the sole consideration of the working class:

"(apparently the worker) should go to work and stay there, and when he can't work any longer, he should go home and go to bed, and after he has done this till he is 55 years of age, he should go home altogether, and if he has not pinched himself enough to save something on his own account, why, he must starve." (29)

A sensitive analysis of economic individualism!

Further evidence towards an assessment of the state of opinion within the Society at about this time is provided by the delegates' reports of the 1894 TUC, the last before the "old unionist" coup d'etat. Of the four delegates, only Burns did not send a report, giving the reason that he was too busy to do so. Of the other three, two were perturbed by the outvoting of the larger bodies by the more numerous smaller societies whose strength in the Congresses was much greater than the total number of their members would warrant, while Mann felt obliged to counter this complaint by pointing out that some large unskilled unions such as the London

28. Monthly Report, Mar., 1894, 53.

29. Ibid., 54.

Dockers were also under-represented. (This, of course, was really beside the point.) It was remarked that for the ASE to be fully represented would cost £400, when "it would become a moot point whether the game was worth the candle." One of these delegates, who contended that

"It was manifestly absurd that the semi-skilled and unskilled bodies, backed by the political and socialist bodies, should be able to swamp the skilled trades at a 'Trades Union Congress'".

advised the Society to secede and join with other unions of skilled workers "to form a real Trades Congress". (This opinion had been fairly common in the Society: when the delegates were being elected, several branches had refused to vote on the ground that participation in the TUC's was a sheer waste of money.) (30)

The other, who was not himself a socialist but saw "no great cause for alarm" at the trend of the Congress, advised sending a complete delegation

"... for if we would but recognise the great desire that has come to the workers for social and industrial freedom, we should see that it is necessary that a great and progressive Society like ours should do its utmost to help forward a movement that has for its object the emancipation of the workers. ... we must recognise the fact that our present methods of working our Trade Unions is (sic) not the success that we would desire. They require augmenting from other sources, and I know of no body of men more qualified to say how this should be done than the delegates to the Trades Congress." (31)

30. Monthly Report, July, 1894, 60.

31. Printed Report, Webb Collection, B XXI, 5.

Before the next Congress in 1895, a ballot of the Society was taken on the question of whether it should continue to be represented, and favoured representation by 6546-1294. Seven delegates were to be sent. (32) The new standing orders for the Congresses, which had been made known in the meantime, may have had some influence on this decision. Nevertheless, although the General Council approved of the new orders and instructed the delegates to support them, it could not countenance the methods by which they were being imposed, and also told the delegates to support the section that was demanding the submission of the new constitution for the approval of the TUC before it was put into operation. (33) At the time when the Parliamentary Committee's plan had first been revealed, Anderson had shown some uneasiness, amidst a general approval:

"Perhaps the effect has been more than commensurate with the cause, but no-one will attempt to deny that a change was necessary, especially when we consider that Trade Union questions direct were excluded from discussion at the Norwich meeting, for the ostensible purpose of making room for the discussion of questions that are not as yet within the range of what a great man used to call 'practical politics'." (34)

In the same report, however, as elsewhere, he had expressed satisfaction with the tendency to return an increasing number of unionists to local governing bodies. And a month or two

32. Monthly Report, April, 1895, 20.

33. Ibid., Sept., 1895, 23.

34. Ibid., Jan., 1895, 23.

later he demonstrated that even an "old" unionist saw through different eyes from the party parliamentarian by being greatly amused at the consternation of the Committee on the Unemployed on being told that £100,000 would be needed just as a first instalment for any attempt to remedy the prevailing hardship. (35)

At long last in 1895 the depression that had been weighing down upon the Society since 1892 began to lift. In his Annual Report at the end of that year Anderson went so far as to state:

"As we have now entered upon what promises to be a period of prosperity, let us take full advantage of it with due discretion, never forgetting that moderation in our demands which has ever characterised us, as such a disposition on our part is sure eventually to command the attention and respect of our employers." (36)

But by this time there were signs that this degree of militancy was not enough for a large proportion of the members. The Society had weathered the depression extremely well, having actually gained in membership and funds, and was growing impatient for action. Already in May, 1895, George Barnes, an ILP man who was to be one of the Party's candidates at the General Election of that year, had resigned the Assistant Secretaryship to contest the position of General Secretary in opposition to Anderson. Amid the usual cries of "waste of money" and with the issue clearly the question of a more

35. Monthly Report, March, 1895, 25.

36. Annual Report, xiv.

aggressive policy, he had gained 11,603 votes to Anderson's 12,910. In the circumstances, considering the deep-set reluctance of trade unionists to oust a sitting official, this had amounted to a victory. (37) Then between October, 1895, and January, 1896, the Council had come into conflict with the Belfast branch over a complicated dispute with their employers in which the Clyde engineers were also involved. With some justification they had forced the Belfast branch to break off the strike against bitter opposition from the men. But at a Delegate Meeting four months later a clear majority had severely condemned the Council's action. (38)

In August, on the grounds of over-indulgence in drink while on duty, for which it was alleged he had often been leniently excused before, the Council dismissed Anderson from the Secretaryship. Nevertheless he contested the subsequent election for the office. On this occasion Barnes was successful with 17,371 votes, Anderson being next in a list of seven candidates with about 9,000. And in the same year three retiring Councillors were only narrowly successful in regaining election, the majority in each case being only about 250 votes. (39)

37. Monthly Report, May, 1895, 20.

38. Monthly Reports, especially Nov., 1895, 20ff, and Feb., 1896, 16-9; Jeffreys, 140.

39. Monthly Reports, August, 1896, 17-9; Dec. 19; also Quarterly Report, Sept., 1896, 51ff.

Nevertheless Barnes's success was hardly a socialist victory. He certainly did not use his new position to propagandise ILP doctrines within the Society. Beyond a slightly more pronounced stress on the benefits of labour legislation, generally very detailed and practical and related rather narrowly to trade union interests, there was little material in his new "Journal" - one of the main innovations he had advocated - that could not have appeared, or in fact was not similar to much that had been published, in the old "Monthly Report". The emphasis was just a trifle more marked, the generalisation carried merely a degree further: there was certainly no reference to the "nationalisation of the means of production". No attempt was made to press political activity. It was in fact in the industrial field that the change could be most clearly seen, in the form of a much more aggressive tone. The stage was set for the Society's 1897 lock-out which was to be one of the most influential events in the history of British trade unionism.

On the one hand, the Engineering Employers' Federation formed in March, 1894, had now built up its strength and was seeking an opportunity to curb the growing ambitions of the men. On the other, the Society was more than ready to take up the challenge. In the past it had merely been holding

its ground; now the members were impatient for some positive and really noteworthy gain, such as a general concession of the eight hour day. Moreover, many of the members now felt their security threatened by the introduction of the new capstan and turrett lathes and milling and boring machines, which had so accelerated at this time as to make the decisions of the Leeds Delegate Meeting of 1892 "out-of-date as soon as they were made."⁽⁴⁰⁾ Fundamentally - and this motivation often came through to the surface - it was a clash of wills. The workers were eager to impose their own conditions on the industry; the employers had determined to rid themselves of union "interference". One spokesman stated their object as "to get rid of trade unionism altogether." Although the objection raised by the employers to the eight hour day was that they could not afford the increased costs, yet Armstrong's, the leading firm in the Federation, had returned a net profit of £358,000 in 1896: the contest was really one for power.⁽⁴¹⁾

By March, 1897, the approach of the struggle had become so obvious that the Society raised a special levy of

40. Jeffreys, 145.

41. Ibid., 144ff.; Journal, July, 1897, 45ff; Notes on the Engineering Trade Lock-Out, 1897-8 (Webb Collection, B XLIX): "The temper of the disputants was largely the cause of the trouble." (p. 3).

ninence per member to reinforce its funds. (42) Eventually in July, arising out of a London attempt to gain the eight hours day, the lock-out began, the employers extending the dispute by shutting out union men in batches of a quarter each week throughout the country. Almost at once the issue was widened to include the question of the new machines. A battle of propaganda was joined, in which the Society had difficulty in persuading the public that it was not opposing technical progress.

Although the employers made considerable use of the Free Labour Association, a strike-breaking organisation formed on pseudo trade union lines, the blacklegs it supplied gave them little satisfaction. There were the usual police-court picketing cases, in which the magistrates displayed their usual bias. For some months the men remained confident. But inevitably the strain began to tell. By the beginning of October, with the Federation forcing many employers to join in by means of a boycott, the lock-out had spread to 579 firms. About 45,000 men were now involved, of whom about 22,000 were members of the ASE. As many of the smaller societies also concerned in the dispute had quickly exhausted their funds, the Society was soon supporting them too, in addition to making the necessary grants to non-unionists.

By the end of November 47,500 men were locked-out from a total of 702 firms, and the contest was costing the ASE from £25,000 to £30,000 a week. At this rate even the Society's long-amassed funds, which at the beginning of the lock-out had been at the record level of more than £360,000, could not last very long. And this was despite the fact that generous aid had supplemented these resources. Officers were foregoing their salaries and many members had made loans; members of the union had contributed £250,000 by mid-December, but the levies had been so heavy that further calls were out of the question. A total of about £116,000 had been received in donations, including more than £28,000 from Continental and Colonial unions - more than half of this sum coming from German unions. Although the TUC Parliamentary Committee had done little to organise help, this neglect causing considerable ill-feeling later, practically every union in Britain had contributed.

For all this immense expenditure, the employers had the longer purse, and it became obvious that the Society could not hold out much longer. At the end of November, when proposals were made by the employers that would effectively have abolished collective bargaining, they were rejected by the men overwhelmingly 68,966-752. But in mid-January a joint committee of the executives of the

various unions decided to make some concessions, and when these were submitted to the membership with a recommendation for acceptance the men voted 28,588-13,927 in favour, many abstaining from the ballot. And so the contest came to an end. Although in March, 1898, when all debts had been repaid, the ASSE funds still stood at £134,000, it was only too obvious that further resistance would have been futile. (43)

Despite the fact that the resulting "Terms of Settlement" (which were to govern the industry until the 1914-18 War) established machinery for collective bargaining, so that the employers had not achieved the aim of driving unionism out of the industry, there was no doubt that they represented a severe defeat for the Society. They completely demonstrated the foolishness of all the assertions of 1892-6 of the benefits to be gained from an aggressive policy. ^{As with} The claim to the eight hours day was of course surrendered, and the employers were given freedom to introduce piecework and to "appoint the men they consider suitable to work... (the machine tools) ... and determine the conditions under which such machine tools shall be worked."

Nor were the unions "to interfere in any way with the wages of workmen outside their own unions." (44)

43. Jeffreys, 144ff; Journals, passim. For origins, see especially July, 45ff.

44. Jeffreys, 147-8, quoting Terms of Settlement.

One result of the defeat was to convince the Society that the ordinary methods of unionism must be supplemented. In the February number of the Journal, immediately after the capitulation, Barnes pointed both to the formation of a general federation and to political action as possible remedies. Quoting a recommendation to the unions by Pickard (a curious source!) that they should send four hundred Labour representatives to Parliament, he asserted:

"Such could be done at a tithe of the outlay of the last six months, and being done, would result not only in obtaining an eight hour day, but in a good many other reforms equally necessary." (45)

But it was the project of federation that aroused much more interest for the moment. As was seen in the previous chapter, this proposal was fraught with almost insuperable difficulties; for the next year and more the correspondence columns of the Journal were almost dominated by letters criticising and defending the various suggested schemes. Their total effect was to demonstrate that no federation that would greatly increase the industrial resources of the unions was yet practicable. Another particular objection of the ASE to the project was that it would tend to bolster up the host of smaller "sectional" unions within the engineering industry, whose very existence conflicted with the Society's principle of amalgamation and in their opinion had contributed

as much as any other avoidable factor to their recent defeat. The constitutional difficulty also loomed large in the Society's view, and was bound up with this issue of sectionalism. It was pointed out that in most of the schemes proposed the systems of representation for the executive body would be such that the ASE could be outvoted by a combination of smaller unions, even although the total membership of this combination were much smaller than that of the Society.(46)

It was, however, primarily because of the limited effectiveness of the federation in the industrial field that the Society's representative on the drafting committee, Isaac Mitchell, reported as early as April, 1898, that, as being planned at that time, the Federation would be of little use to the ASE. Although he advised the Society to join the new body with the purpose of constructing something of more value from it at some future time, he concluded by pointing

46. While ill-feeling following previous demarcation disputes had also had some influence, it was largely this constitutional difficulty, associated again with its disapproval of sectionalism, that had kept the ASE from joining the Federation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Trades set up by Robert Knight in 1891. A large number of branches had at first enthusiastically favoured the proposal; but the Council had evaded the issue by pointing out that it could not commit the Society to join the Federation without going beyond its authority. Although this obstacle was removed at the 1897 Delegate Meeting by adding an authorisation to the rules, bad feeling increased as a result of the defection of the boilermakers and some of the sectional unions during the lock-out. Membership of this narrower federation had therefore become even less of a possibility by 1898.

to the alternative:

"... Government is the key to the position. It is problematical, even with a strong Federation, financially, if we could be successful in a struggle, and certainly much misery would be occasioned. Political action should be our policy; it is methodical and scientific."

In addition he suggested, as others were also proposing, that the machinery of the Federation, particularly its District Committees, could be put to good use for electoral purposes. (47)

It was the federation project, however, that continued to receive most attention in the Journal, amidst frequent approving references to the New Zealand system of compulsory industrial arbitration, until March, 1899, when the new organisation at last came into existence. By this time the general conclusion seems to have been reached that the constitution adopted was the best that was practicable for the moment, but that it would never solve the union's urgent problems. Immediately the interest turned to Labour representation. For some months while the Federation was being set up there had been no reference to this subject but now, actually in the April number of the Journal, Barnes called upon the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC to draw up a scheme for returning Labour candidates to Parliament.

47. Journal, April, 1898, 13-9.

In putting forward this plea he made no mention of any general objective such as socialism. He suggested a specific trade union programme comprising the eight hour day, mediation of the Board of Trade in industrial disputes, payment of Members, taxation of unearned increments (an item revealing rather a wider interest), non-contributory old age pensions, and closer regulation of the conditions of industry. The unions, he proposed, should co-operate for this purpose with sympathetic political bodies - by which he could mean only the socialist societies. (48) The Council had already decided to hold a ballot on the question of a threepenny levy for the institution of a Parliamentary Representation Fund; (49) and the lead Barnes had given was quickly followed by the Journal correspondents.

* When the ballot was taken, however, the results seemed to show that the bulk of the Society were taking little interest in the matter. Of 84,000 members, only 3530 voted in favour of the levy, 842 against, compared with figures of 14,531-1807 a month previously in favour of joining the Federation. (50)

48. Journal, April, 1899, 2-5.

49. Ibid., 6.

50. Journal, June, 1899, 49; May, 51. There had, however, been some misunderstanding regarding the ballot for the political fund levy: some branches had waited for ballot papers, but the voting was meant to be taken by show of hands. (July, 57).

Meanwhile, when the 1899 FUC was held the Society was expelled on a technicality. Involved in a dispute with the Co-operative Smiths, an insignificant union, the ASE refused to accept the finding of an arbitration committee set up by the Congress and, under a standing order, had automatically to be excluded. Although the Congress was greatly perturbed at having to impose this drastic penalty, the constitution left them no option.(51) Early the following year, however, the Society took a prominent part in setting up the "National Committee of Organised Labour for Promoting Old Age Pensions for All", a body including a large though scarcely representative number of unions which agitated for a non-contributory pensions scheme.(52)

Following the decision to establish a political fund, in October, 1899, the Council called for nominations for parliamentary candidates. Barnes was proposed by 31 branches, John Burns by 21, Mitchell and Tom Proctor, both well-known ILP men, by 11 and 9 respectively, and 14 others by 3 branches each or fewer. The Council now ruled, however, that officers of the Society were not to be eligible, thus excluding Barnes

51. Journal, Sept., 1899, 51; 1899 FUC Report, 37.

52. Journal, Feb., 1900, 22. For all their individualist principles, the north-east miners were also prominent in this body.

* and Mitchell. (53) A request for expressions of opinion on whether the Society should be represented at the Memorial Hall conference that was to form the Labour Representation Committee now obtained a response from only 27 branches,

* 18 favouring attendance, and 9 being opposed. (54) Burns, Barnes and another delegate attended as ASE representatives. But, because of the ASE practice of referring all questions of relations with other bodies to the members, they declined an invitation for the Society to be represented on the Executive Committee until a ballot had been taken on the question of affiliation. When this ballot was held, however, in April, only 3,597 took part, the voting being in favour of affiliation by 2897-700. As the poll had been so small, the Council decided to take no action. (55)

It does appear that there was little interest in political activity among the rank and file at this time. None of the Society's candidates - excepting Burns, who, of course, owed little (apart from his £100 a year) to ASE sponsorship - went to the poll at the 1900 General election. Partly the failure to prosecute the other candidates appears to have been due to the suddenness of the dissolution; but, making the comment "We regret that the society is not taking the part which at one time seemed probable" - which

53. Journal, Feb., 1900, 54-5.

54. Ibid., 55. There were about 500 branches in Great Britain at this time.

55. Journal, Mar., 1900, 53-5; April, 56; Jubilee Souvenir, 112.

suggests that interest had actually declined - Barnes placed a good deal of the blame on the Council's action in forbidding the general officers to become candidates. (56) In any case the response to the ballot seemed to have shown a general lack of interest in Labour political activity; and it was also stated at about this time that "Parliamentary representation is yet but a hazy abstraction in the mind of the average member." (57) Moreover, for about the next ten months there was scarcely a single reference to the subject in the journal, either in articles or in the correspondence column, which is usually a sensitive barometer.

Suddenly, in August, 1901, when the Taff Vale decision was pronounced, interest revived. The delegate meeting of that year showed the importance it now attached to political action by rescinding the ruling that permanent officials of the union should not become Parliamentary candidates; (58) and in his annual report Barnes declared: "The need for increased Labour representation, therefore, would seem to be the chief lesson to be learnt from the Taff Vale judgment." (59) There was also a revival of interest in

56. Journal, Oct., 1900, 51. Burns continued to receive his £100 a year from the ASE until it affiliated with the IRC. (Journal, March, 1905, 12).

57. Jubilee Souvenir (1901), 89.

58. Annual Report, 1907, xi.

59. Ibid., 1901, xiii.

the New Zealand device of compulsory arbitration, several articles on this subject being placed before the members, and in addition attention was drawn to the success of the Labour Party in Australia in forming a Labour Government. In February, 1902, the Society affiliated to the LRC. (Even on this occasion, however, the voting, conducted by show of hands in the branch meetings instead of by means of the usual ballot papers, had been only 5626-1070). (60) And later in the year five parliamentary candidates were selected: F. Rose (Stockton), Mitchell (Darlington), Barnes (Hutchesontown, Glasgow), F. Entwhistle - who died shortly afterwards and was replaced by C. Duncan (Harrow), and G. Ferguson - later replaced by Proctor (Grimsby). (Burns had declined nomination.) (61) Meanwhile discussion of Labour representation had again begun to take a prominent place in the Society's forum - the correspondence section of the Journal. As yet, however, there was a curious lack of mention of the LRC. Although some of them may have been taking its function for granted, most of the writers certainly appeared to view the matter as being primarily a case for action on the part of the ASE itself.

After the 1902 LRC conference, however, that body

60. Journal, Feb., 1902, 65.

61. Journal, Aug., 1902, 78; Nov., 74. Barnes had been nominated by 125 branches, and no fewer than 92 different members had been nominated.

seemed to be more clearly accepted as the political organisation of the Labour movement. In March, 1902, when the Council conducted a ballot on the question of rejoining the TUC, its advice to the Society was that their industrial and political interests were already catered for by the Federation and the LRC respectively. (In the current number of the Journal Barnes had been pouring scorn upon the Parliamentary Committee's suggestion regarding the Taff Vale decision that the unions form themselves into limited companies). The proposed re-affiliation was rejected 8481-10,906. (62) Yet at the end of the year when a further ballot was taken on the question of joining the LRC's penny-a-year scheme for raising a fund, only 3895 voted in favour, and 341 against. Possibly the decision was taken for granted, as the money would in any case come out of the Society's own Parliamentary Fund, and rejection would have meant disaffiliation. (63) Certainly there was no lack of attention to politics in the Journal at this time. Again in May, 1903, when a third ballot was taken, this time on whether the Society should join the LRC "Maintenance Fund" - the new device by which the Committee was attempting to unify

62. Journal, Mar., 1902, 62; May, 71.

63. Journal, Jan., 1903, 60. In the contest for the selection of candidates, however, only two months earlier, Barnes had received 14,770 votes, and the last successful candidate 5579.

all its affiliates into a political party - only 2473 participated, 2151 being in favour to 322 opposing." (64) As this was not thought satisfactory, the vote was retaken in November. It was then explained that while the proposal would require the Society to contribute £380 annually, if only two of its candidates were returned to Parliament they would be able to claim £400 annually in salaries, in addition to a contribution towards electoral expenses. On this occasion there was a better response, the proposal being carried 15,246-6311. (65)

In the following years, the course of the by-elections leading up to the general election of 1906 was closely followed in the Journal, and the augury of coming success proclaimed. By 1905 the TUC was being described as "just a sounding-board... we are inclined to think it has even ceased to regard itself seriously." (66) Then in the course of that year came the famous general election victory that belonged to the whole of the labour movement, Barnes himself being one of the engineers' two successful candidates, ousting Bonar Law, the future leader of the Conservatives, from Hutesentown. The other was Charles Duncan, for Barrow. (In addition to being a member of the ASE, Duncan

64. Journal, June, 1903, 63.

65. Journal, Dec., 1903, 58.

66. Journal, Oct., 1905, 25-6.

was Secretary of the General Workers' Union.)

At last, it would appear from this survey, the Taff Vale decision had forced the membership of the ASE into decisive independent political action. Yet in 1907, looking back over the years, Barnes placed his emphasis on an earlier date. It was the 1897 lock-out that he selected as the beginning of a new era:

"This may be regarded as the end of parochialism in trade unionism. It was bound to come, and much trouble might have been avoided had it come earlier. A habit of mind had been allowed to develop which, while paying empty homage to the principle of amalgamation, had really reimposed upon Trade Unionism the old evils and weaknesses of sectionalism, from which Newton and Allan had rescued it fifty years before. The absence of national organisation of employers had rather favoured this, but the advent of employers' federations had made its continuance impossible. From that time forward, a larger loyalty and a more extended outlook - in Trade Unionism as well as in other matters - became a necessity." (67)

(b). The National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives.

Further light is thrown on the course of the movement towards independent political action by the history of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives.(1) Although its attitudes were generally similar, this society differed in some respects from the ASE. Its most distinctive characteristic was a strongly marked tradition in favour of piece-work and the use of arbitration. From the founding of the Union in 1874, its first leader, Thomas Smith (who had retired in 1878 to become Secretary of the Leicester Liberal Association), had made this principle the basis of all its activity.(2) And on the whole arbitration was a suitable method for coping with the problems of the trade. Leaving the field of hand-work, which continued to be profitable as a luxury trade, to the older Amalgamated Society of Boot and Shoe Makers, the National Union catered for the new machine industry. The long, complex piece-work scales with which, in similar fashion to the Lancashire textile workers, it attempted to maintain control over the introduction of new methods of production were, of course, best drawn up in close consultation with representatives of the employers. For their part, the progressive employers, who were trying to

-
1. Until 1890 the name of the society was "National Union of Boot and Shoe Rivetters and Finishers".
 2. Fifty Years - the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, 1874-1924, 13, 18.

complete the transition of the industry from the domestic to the factory system, at first found it to their advantage to co-operate in attempting to impose standard conditions and rates of payment upon all the firms engaged in the manufacture. (3)

In other respects the Union largely conformed to the general pattern of "old" unionism. Most of the members were skilled workers: branches of "clickers" were set up in some centres, but for the most part these less-skilled workers were treated separately in negotiations, and they had a separate representative on the Council. In any case it was not the "clickers" who constituted the unskilled menace in the industry, but boy labour. Although it was necessary to have separate agreements in the various centres, the constitution imposed a large measure of centralised control, and as far as possible policy was planned on the national scale. Difficulties arose in this connection because of the irregular distribution of the industry: the Leicester branches were almost strong enough to dominate the Union. But there were also large branches in Northampton, London and Bristol. The society had begun the eighties with just over 3,000 members, but increased steadily to 6,500 in 1885 and 13,760 in 1889. It almost doubled in the following

year, and by 1892 numbered 42,524.

Despite its preference for arbitration, the Union does not seem to have been hesitant about striking when the occasion demanded. In the mid-eighties, at the end of the long depression, there were a number of contests with the employers, culminating in a big Northampton strike in 1887. The men had ceased work mainly in order to force the establishment of arbitration machinery, and although the settlement was a compromise, this demand was conceded and a board was set up. This was soon extended into a system comprising a national and several local arbitration boards. By this means the Union had obtained a good measure of control over the industry. For instance, by obtaining directions from the boards it was able to abolish outwork in most of the large centres within a few years. The progressive employers, who appear to have had control of the manufacturers' body, found it in their interests to support the Union in this matter, and brought pressure to bear on the more backward firms to force them to provide workshops. They also seem to have favoured the action of the Union in forcing employers into the arbitration system by means of the threat of strike action, and in following employers into country towns where they had sent out some of their work in order to evade the

scales.(4) The main issue in contention between the Union and the employers was that of boy labour. The Union asked for a proportion of one boy to each five machinists; but in an award of 1892 Sir Henry James, (later Lord James of Hereford), who for many years was the umpire of the national board, ruled that it should be one to three.(5)

By the early nineties, therefore, despite a steady if gradual improvement in machinery,(6) the Union had been able to guard the interests of its members rather well. And its relations with the employers were moderately good. Nevertheless there were signs that many branches were far from satisfied with the position. At first this discontent seemed to show itself in the form of advanced political views. Thus, despite a plea for a negative vote by the General Secretary, William Inskip, who was one of the old guard of the TUC Parliamentary Committee and strongly opposed the "legal" principle, only a handful of members took part in the ballot in 1889 on the eight hour day. The voting on the general issue was 629-162 in favour, and on the question of legislative action 595-24; but, curiously, it appears to be the smallness of the figures rather than

4. Fifty Years, 25; Webbs: Trade Unionism, 493.

5. Ibid., 30. Girl labour was not yet a problem of the Union, although it was to cause serious difficulty later. The first reference to it in the monthly reports is in July, 1904. See also Biennial Conference Report, 1904, 15.

6. H. Cox (ed): British Industries under Free Trade: article on boot and shoe trade, passim.

the actual result that was significant. Most branches had misgivings about the effects of a shorter day on the industry because its seasonable character and the vagaries of foot-wear fashions made it very liable to fluctuation, and many stated that for this reason they had declined to vote. Apparently, therefore, since they had not followed Inskip's direction to return a negative vote in these circumstances, they had little fear of collectivism as a general principle. (7) And that distaste for legislative methods played little part in this abstention from the ballot seems also to be shown by the opinions expressed when, as early as 1892, the Union decided to run a candidate for Parliament.

Why had the Union come to this decision at such an early date? The suggestion was first made early in 1891 by the Northampton branch. It was then thrown open for discussion in the pages of the monthly report, and aroused marked interest. Most of the branches taking part in the correspondence were decidedly in favour of the proposal, the main reason given being almost invariably that although there was now a great volume of legislation that touched their interests, it was only the employers' case that was heard in Parliament. Although most of the arguments appeared to imply that it was protection of their own trade interests

that the unionists had in mind - for instance they frequently pointed to the success of the miners' M.P.s in obtaining favourable mining legislation - there were also references to the need for representation of the working-class generally. The urgent need for Parliament to give attention to alleviating distress during depression was often mentioned.⁽⁸⁾ And certainly, when the whole question was debated at the Biennial Conference of the Union in June, 1892, the socialist influence seemed to predominate. The majority were in favour of the objective being stated as the nationalisation of the means of production, and gave way only reluctantly when Inskip, who had been elected as "Parliamentary Agent", insisted upon altering the wording to "the ultimate nationalisation of the land, mines, quarries, telephones, etc." (Telephones were regarded with a certain amount of awe at this time, and apparently no questions were to be asked about the meaning of "etc.!") And despite his vehement opposition, notwithstanding even his plea that they could quickly discipline him if ever he sacrificed their interests to party considerations, it was voted by no fewer than 42-4 that his candidature should be independent of either party. (But some at least of the delegates believed that an independent candidature would cause less dissension within the Union.) Funds for the election campaign were

to be raised by a special levy.(9)

Thus, rather unpromisingly, Inskip, who was a confirmed Liberal, entered the field for Northampton. Apparently he did not go to the poll in 1892, on grounds of ill-health, but he was still working in the constituency in 1894. In February, 1894, it was reported that a meeting in support of his campaign had been divided, a section of the audience demanding a "genuine Labour candidate" pledged to the objective of complete nationalisation as carried at the 1893 TUC.(10) And at the 1894 Biennial Conference this same socialist objective was adopted by a large majority. In attempting to move an amendment, Inskip could not find even a seconder. On the other hand the previous resolution that the candidature should be completely independent was now rescinded 33-14. Apparently, since most of those who took part in the debate objected to the previous stipulation merely on the ground that it imposed an unnecessary handicap, this was a question of tactical expediency, and not of principle. The determining factor was that the Northampton Radicals had refused their support unless Radicals were supported in return in other electorates. It was argued that such a bargain would not really compromise Labour independence,

9. Biennial Conference Report, 1892, 11ff.

10. Monthly Report.

and that Hardie had been prevented from doing much good work in the Commons by his too-rigid insistence upon a strictly independent position. Thus the curious decision was taken, without any evident sense of incongruity, that a socialist candidate was to be brought out in alliance with the Liberals. (11)

Although he had had his way on one point, Inskip had, however, been pushed too far on the other. Making a detailed statement of his individualist beliefs on the usual lines, he now resigned the position of Parliamentary Agent on the ground that he could not advocate socialism. (12) Yet in the election to fill the vacancy, the successful candidate was Charles Freak, the permanent Secretary of the large London Metro Branch - a convinced and well-known Radical, who had often opposed socialist resolutions in debate. (Although some ILP men had been nominated, none had been willing to stand.) (13) And on the other hand, despite Inskip's refusal to compromise his Radical principles beyond a certain point, it is probable that his political views differed rather slightly from those of the majority of the members. He once asserted, for instance, that "Men who are willing to toil have a right to live, and the conditions of society that prevent this are rotten and

11. Biennial Conference Report, 1894, 32ff.

12. Monthly Report, May, 1894.

13. Ibid., July-Aug., 1894.

ought to be altered" (14) - which could have served quite well as a socialist slogan - and on another occasion, with reference to a co-operative workshop that the Leicester branch were operating:

"They had studied the interests of the employers too much in the past; they intended to study themselves a little more. He hoped the time was not far distant when they should be able to do without employers." (15)

Moreover, together with the rest of the Council, he was apparently strongly in favour of non-contributory old age pensions.

During this period when political action was being attempted, dissatisfaction was also mounting on both sides - workers and employers - with the arbitration system. On the union side opinion was divided. The London Metro branch particularly was losing all patience at the long delays, the prolonged wrangling over technicalities and interpretations of decisions, and the awards, which they considered most unsatisfactory. But, while ready to admit the justice of these complaints, the Council and the great majority of the delegates to the Biennial Conferences still preferred the arbitration system with all its defects to the old method of settling disputes by strikes and lockouts,

14. Monthly Report, Sept., 1892.

15. Ibid., Nov., 1894.

with all its hardships. They argued especially that arbitration was a great boon in times of depression, when it acted as a very effective brake on reductions in wages, while the unions were otherwise powerless. A good deal of the opposition to arbitration came from the IIP element in the Union, who asserted that justice could never be expected from a capitalist umpire. (The Northampton board did actually have a working-man umpire, but this was a single exception.) (16) The retort, of course, was that half a loaf was better than no bread. (17)

It would be impossible to examine this difference of opinion on arbitration without noticing certain marked characteristics of the branches concerned. The London Metro branch particularly was a constant source of trouble in the Union, frequently through irresponsibility. There could be little doubt in the mind of any student of the Society's records that Insclip had instances such as the repeated difficulties caused by this branch in mind when he complained later, regarding an exasperating case in the Norwich strike of 1897, that it was "the old, old story, which experience brings to every union", that those who were originally the most militant in a dispute were also those who were least loyal to their fellow unionists in a time of

16. Monthly Report, April, 1894.

17. Ibid., *passim*, esp. April, 1893.

crisis, the first to surrender, even when this was not in the union's interests. (18) Militancy did generally go hand in hand with selfishness and irresponsibility. (Thus it was the militant London Metro branch that was the first to wish to return to work in the 1895 lock-out, and it was also the most short-sighted in agitating for the repayment of loans made from branch funds to the Council during that dispute.) (19)

One of the assertions made by the anti-arbitration faction was that the union would have obtained much larger wage-increases by using its industrial strength, and that, knowing this, the employers were sheltering behind the arbitration system. That this analysis was scarcely true seems to be shown by the fact that, when the 1895 lock-out now began, it was the employers who withdrew from the boards. Their ground was that

"they (the boards) have become a vehicle (sic) for the general abuse of manufacturers, and the introduction of propositions based upon extreme Socialistic doctrines, encroaching upon the individual rights of manufacturers. In fact they have been made the easy means of raising disputes rather than settling them." (20)

One of the "Socialistic encroachments" upon their sphere of

18. Monthly Report, June, 1897.

19. Ibid., Oct., 1896.

20. Monthly Report, Nov., Dec., 1894. See also pamphlet on the employers' case in Webb Collection. The employers protested that some of the men still endeavoured to come and go when they pleased under piece work, even when employed in factories. This was still the practice of the handworkers of the Amalgamated Society

management had been the prohibition of a "team system" of working, which according to the Union enabled the employers to evade the statement. In short, the dispute was over the issue of further mechanisation. Impelled, apparently, by a stream of American footwear, cheaply produced by machines far in advance of their own, that began to flow into the country at this time, the employers intended to abolish piece-work, freeze time wages, and introduce the new machines on their own conditions. (21)

The lock-out followed, and lasted about nine weeks. It ended in a compromise: arbitration was re-established without any limit to the field of reference, but the employers were given the right to introduce day instead of piece-work - a set-back to the Union on the issue of mechanisation. Although the whole of the sick fund had been raided, and help received from other societies, the Council had reached the point of being unable to distribute another week's strike pay when the contest ended. (22) When the arbitration boards were restored, the employers returned with a bad grace, raising a large number of points of

21. Cox: *op. cit.*; *Fifty Years*, 34.

22. *Fifty Years*, 34; *Monthly Reports*, May, June, 1895. The Webbs refer to the lock-out as occurring in 1894 (*Trade Unionism*, 493), but it actually began in March, 1895.

interpretation of the settlement, every one of which was decided by the umpire in favour of the Union. (23) Once again, it seemed, employers were doing their utmost to arouse the resentment of trade unionists.

Following the lock-out, the question of political activity was again fully debated at the 1896 Biennial Conference. By arrangement with the Liberals, Freak had not been nominated for Leicester, the electorate - a two-member constituency - in which the Union was strongest, for the 1895 general election; but Joseph Burgess had then stepped into his place as the independent Labour candidate under the auspices of the ILP. The Council had continued to support Broadhurst, who was one of the Liberal candidates; and Inskip now defended its action on the ground that the independent policy was futile in that electorate.

(Broadhurst had topped the poll with 9792 votes, to 7753 for the other Liberal, 7654 for the Conservative candidate and 4009 for Burgess). Relating the experience of a recent Leicester Town Council election, when he himself had been returned with a record majority as a Liberal Councillor, while some independent Labour candidates had been badly defeated, he claimed that in that town it was "the Liberal Party whom the majority of working-men supported." He

23. Monthly Reports, esp. May, 1896.

explained, however, that although he himself could not support a socialist candidate, the Council was prepared to do so. The luminence of the lock-out was also pleaded as an excuse for the failure to contest a seat in 1895. Nevertheless, there were heated recriminations over this omission. Eventually, by 38-9 it was agreed that, with the approval of a ballot of the Union, any branch might attempt to run the society's candidate in its own electorate⁽²⁴⁾ Apparently, however, as there are no more references for some years to any Parliamentary candidates, none of the branches made use of this decision. As was also the case in the rest of the Labour Movement, interest in political activity seems to have waned in the following years. Shortly after the conference, Freak resigned from the position of Parliamentary Agent, and when an election was held to replace him, the ballot had to be taken twice, as insufficient interest was shown on the first occasion. Fewer than 3000 had voted, and on the second attempt the figures were little more satisfactory, only 4172 members taking part.⁽²⁵⁾

24. Biennial Conference Report, 1896, 23-5.

25. Monthly Reports, Aug.; Sept.; 1896. The membership of the Union was about 36,000 at this time. This response compared not very unfavourably, however, with the figure of 6976 who voted just before the lock-out on proposals to be put to the employers regarding the issue in dispute. (Monthly Report, Mar., 1895).

Unfortunately, as it has not been possible to obtain any copies of the reports for 1898, no clear indication can be given of the Union's reaction to the project that was the centre of interest in that year - the General Federation of Trade Unions. Certainly the Union had followed the ASE lock-out with close attention, voting the Engineers £300, which was as much as it could afford. (26) And Inskip had expressed satisfaction with the 1897 TUC, claiming that at last there were indications that the "old" and "new" parties were beginning to reach a common viewpoint. (27) When the General Federation was eventually formed, the Union had a representative on its committee of management.

In May, 1899, at 47, Inskip died from consumption that had gradually been weakening him since before 1895. In the resulting election for the Secretaryship, W.B. Hornidge, the President, who belonged unequivocally to the "old" party, defeated T. F. Richards, one of the leaders of the ILP faction, by 4501 to 3139. (28) Probably the voting was a fair measure

(26). Monthly Report, Nov., 1897.

(27). Ibid., Sept., 1897.

(28). Ibid., May, July, Aug., 1899. In 1895 Hornidge had stated that he thought the independent policy would "take more than one life-time... I feel that the workers, if only properly organised, have power in their hands now to compel definite action for their amelioration from those they place in power." (Ibid., Sept., 1895).

of the strength of the two parties within the Union at the time. Thus Hornidge, who took up Inskip's work in the Union and on the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC as if there had been no change, was the author of the monthly reports when the 1899 TUC was held. There was certainly no hint in the reports that the 1899 Congress was to be any more momentous than any of its predecessors; but, as these usually consist only of trade statistics and the Secretary's monthly letter, they are hardly a satisfactory indication of opinion within the society. In fact one of the resolutions at the TUC calling for co-operation with the socialist bodies came from the Leicester No. 1 branch of the Union. Nevertheless Hornidge and some of the other delegates voted against the resolution that was eventually adopted. Reporting back to the society, he remarked rather churlishly of the delegates who had supported it that they "apparently think that the passing of a resolution at Congress means the carrying of it into effect." At the same time, however, he mentioned that the Council of the Union, who "have strong opinions on this and other subjects", were very gratified with the decision to press for non-contributory old age pensions and stressed that these should be accorded as a right. (29)

When the request was eventually made for nominations for delegates to the Memorial Hall conference that was to inaugurate the LRC, this was done without any comment upon the importance or lack of importance of the occasion. (30) And after the Conference the Council decided at once to affiliate, without consulting the opinion of the members on the subject. (31) Considerable interest seems to have been shown, however, at the 1900 Biennial Conference, which was addressed by Ramsay MacDonald on the objects and constitution of the new Committee. Freak, who was now President of the Union, gave MacDonald a very warm introduction, no-one ventured to express opposition, and a motion was passed unanimously in approval of the venture. (32)

Following this conference, there is a further gap in the Union's records. At the 1904 Biennial Conference, however, we find that Richards is now the Parliamentary Agent, and at this conference provision was made for running a second candidate, although no immediate action was to be taken pending the further development of the LRC. Once again a debate on the socialist objective was held. On this occasion only Freak and Hornidge, who asserted that it would drive men away from the Union, spoke in opposition to

30. Monthly Report, Nov., 1899.

31. Ibid., March, 1900.

32. Biennial Conference Report, 1900, 47-49.

the socialist resolution, which was carried by a large majority. (33) Despite his attitude on this point, however, Freak, a "practical", unliterary man, was always an ardent advocate of the IFC, and many of his utterances had a strongly collectivist flavour. In October of this same year, for instance, he declared:

"We must take hold of the system of government and handle (it) for ourselves... What good is it to boast of a rich country which allows any person to starve?" (34)

And again, in December, he called for heavily graduated taxation, rising to "cent per cent" -

"... as no man, by his own labour, earns the great wealth some of them possess, but it is because he gets it out of the general wealth--producing power of the country." (35)

A few months previously the Union's delegates to the TUC had drawn up a list of the subjects on which they thought

legislation was urgently needed: workers' compensation, old age pensions, workers' housing, and compulsory arbitration. (36)

(Although Freak was always opposed to this last measure, on the ground that neither workers nor employers could be compelled, it had the general support of the Union, most of

33. Biennial Conference Report, 1904, 38-9.

34. Monthly Report, Oct., 1904.

35. Ibid., Dec., 1904.

36. Ibid., Sept., 1904.

the leading members believing that it followed logically from the society's own practice.) (37)

In January, 1905, Richards was adopted at the IRC candidate for West Wolverhampton. Although they had been defeated by only 823 votes on that occasion, the Liberals had not contested the seat since 1895, and now, in addition to all the local trade union officials, the local Liberals and their press gave Richards full support. The sitting Member, a Conservative of the most reactionary type, had opposed the 1904 Trades Dispute Bill, and Richards' supporters declared that "... if that had been the only thing he had done, it would be sufficient to condemn him in the eyes of all right-thinking working-men." (38) Although he stated that he was an "out and out nationaliser", Richards appears to have made no use of the term "socialism" in his campaign, placing most stress, apart from the Tafr Vale question, on the need to organise public works for the relief of the unemployed. When the election came in 1906, it was Richards who won the seat. (39)

Thus, although the records of the Union used for the present purposes are not full or clear enough to enable a complete reconstruction of the development that took place

37. See especially Monthly Report, Feb., 1905.

38. Monthly Report, Jan., 1905.

39. See esp. *Ibid.*, March, 1905.

within the society, they do seem to throw further light upon the attitudes of the opposing parties. While both "new" and "old" factions had been strong within the Union, the "old" men had always tended to collectivism in their political thought, for all their hostility to socialism as a rallying cry. They had certainly never revealed any trace of general approval of the existing economic system, and on the issue of political action had always argued from considerations of tactical expediency. As early as 1891 the Union had been eager to take action to effectively assert its point of view in politics. Even its comparative effectiveness in the industrial field does not seem to have diminished its sense of urgency in this matter: it appears to have been largely the practical difficulties and the division of opinion on the tactical question, together with the other general influences that were affecting the whole of the Labour movement, that caused interest to decrease for a time after 1896. And, despite its continued reliance upon arbitration and the continued disapproval of socialism on the part of its officials, the Union had been rather remarkable for its constant adherence to "the nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange" as the general political objective.

CHAPTER 16.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.

It is time now to attempt to summarise the origins of the revolt of the British Labour movement from Liberalism, which culminated in the creation of a third major party in the national politics. Were the main factors economic or social, or was this event largely the result of some sort of dialectic process in the development of British political thought? What did the workers want, and what was the source of their discontent?

Just as in the sixteenth century and again in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries a new social class had emerged to political consciousness and demanded a share in government, so also in the late nineteenth century, as the product of further economic and social change, the working class had attained full human stature and was now insisting in its turn upon full participation in the control of the state. Meanwhile the appropriate political philosophy had taken shape to rationalise its demand and, in thus helping to clarify it, had itself become a stimulus to its further development.

This phenomenon was not by any means a revolutionary growth which can be contained within a short term of ten or

fifteen years. It was in fact the product of a fascinating interaction of factors from almost every field of the national life over a much longer period. While, as the Hammonds have shown, it can be traced in broad outline back at least as far as the Chartists, by the 1860's and 1870's it had already assumed much of its modern character. Although handicapped and restrained by a hostile environment, the "old" unionists of that time were essentially class-conscious, in both their industrial practice and their political activities. If its essence was obscured - from the fact that no others were available - by the use of individualist terms, virtually all of their political thought was implicitly socialist; and they certainly displayed a very real measure of independence in their relations with the Liberal Party. In any case Liberalism was still the progressive force in the political life of that time, its liberating potentialities apparently as yet only half developed. The workers had no reason yet not to believe that they might eventually capture it for their own further purposes and, on some lines still unplanned, extend Radical policies of political and social emancipation into the economic sphere. Later the situation had changed: by the end of the eighties they could no longer with any reason be very optimistic in their hopes of the Liberals.

It did in fact appear in 1885-6 that the trade unions were on the point of setting up an independent Labour Party; but the organisation formed at that time - the Labour Electoral Association - quickly declined into something much less than this. Partly, perhaps, from fear of being associated with the socialist bodies that were emerging at this period, the unionists seem to have drawn back from the idea of independent action in 1887-8 and the following years. But their reluctance to break away from the Liberal Party was due mainly to very reasonable, if mistaken, considerations of expediency. It was an error of judgment on this question of expediency rather than actual preference for the Liberal policies that caused most of the union leaders to remain longer in the Liberal camp in the nineties than was really profitable for their followers. But, while justifiably deprecating rashness, they were still maintaining a zealous guard over their interests in the industrial field at that time.

Meanwhile the same social and economic forces that, by giving the artisans sufficient self-respect, had made the "old" unionism possible in the sixties and seventies had now lifted the working class to a higher plane of political consciousness. Better and more wide-spread education, shorter working hours, improved housing, a steady increase in real income and a flow

of cheap luxury goods into the market had produced a remarkable civilising effect and had greatly raised the level of their demands. Although one may doubt whether economic fluctuations had greatly worsened in the period, one result of the new level of demand had certainly been a very marked increase in the workers' resentment of the poverty and distress caused by fluctuation. (Since they had never been content with the economic system, the "Great Depression" had not been able to discredit it in their eyes, though the questionings it had caused among the middle-classes had contributed valuable assistance to the clarification of the workers' grievances.) At the same time, however, the greatly accelerated mechanisation of industry, "speeding-up", the extension of the factory system, and the tightening of industrial discipline - in short, all the forces whose effect in intensifying "wage slavery" were so strong in these years - were working directly counter to the forces that were producing new self-respect and ambition. This clash created an inchoate but important element in the increasing resentment.

One grade of the working class that does not appear to have participated as much as the rest in the general rise in living standards was the lowest - the unskilled workers. They had played a very minor part in the movement. Certainly the

spectacular emergence of the "new" unions may have been partly due to the fact that their standards had risen to a certain extent; but most of these "new" bodies had been rather premature. Their members tended to be most irresponsible, and were not the material on which a sustained political movement could have been built. The "new" unions had never been strong in the TUCs or possessed much influence there, and they had quickly been assimilated to the rest of the unions, from whom they had never been very different in any case. While their emergence did help to stimulate the growing interest in social problems which was an important element in the new political movement, this interest had been very marked among the unionists some years earlier. There seems little reason to suppose that the course of the political movement would have been very different if the "new" unions had delayed their appearance for another decade or more.

Although the claim is often made in general terms that this was one of the most important economic factors in changing the temper of unionism, it is difficult to find any satisfactory evidence that the increase in mechanisation was so undermining the industrial strength of the societies of craft workers in this period as to make a new type of unionism necessary. The judgment on this question must be "not proven". It seems

just as likely that, for all the ingenuity and elaborate character of their economic weapons, the industrial position of the "old" unions had never been as strong as many of their members were wont to imagine in the 1890's: the apparently excessive caution of their leaders was probably due in reality, in part at least, to their realisation of this fact. (Certainly the unions that did seem reasonably adequate in the industrial field were those, such as the cotton operatives' organisations, which had been able to devise efficient methods to cope with increasing mechanisation; and it seems probable that mechanisation weakened the position of the tradesmen much more seriously after the turn of the century.)

At all events, even in the middle of the nineties the majority of unionists were confident enough of their strength in industry to prefer to rely upon their economic resources rather than alienate the Liberals by setting up a separate political party. A large proportion believed they had more to lose than to gain by suggesting that Parliament should undertake extensive legislation in the field of industry. They were reluctant, very justifiably, to create a precedent for state control of wage-rates. Then the rising tide of ambition brought the engineers to try their vaunted strength, with the result that their resounding defeat in the 1897

lock-out marks more than any other single event the conversion of the trade union movement to the independent Labour policy. Thoroughly disillusioned, the unionists sought to supplement their inadequate industrial power by recourse to more determined political action.

As yet, however, the conversion was not quite complete. The engineers' defeat had been at the hands of a federation stronger than themselves: alarmed at the rising tide of militancy in the unions, the employers had - true to "old unionist" predictions - greatly improved their industrial position by closer organisation. This lesson had been enough for most of the unions. But the employers also possessed even a stronger weapon in their armoury - the control of Parliament. When the Taff Vale judgment was now pronounced, dealing a crippling blow to unionism, it soon became obvious that neither of the traditional political parties was prepared to rectify it for the unions. The legend of their industrial self-sufficiency now completely destroyed, the unionists turned with deeper conviction to the Labour Representation Committee. Thus the analysis of the Beehive as long ago as 1862 was closely confirmed: that the unions would take determined political action only

"when they find their existence is endangered, not by their interference in politics, but by the interference of political power with them." (1)

1. The Beehive, Dec. 6, 1862.

Nevertheless, for all the decisive and culminating effect of the Taff Vale judgment, the formation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 had also been an important landmark in British political history.

Why did this historic development take the form of an alliance with a socialist party? From the preceding analysis, it follows that this alliance was hardly a necessary feature of the incident: it had been the course of industrial events, not the persuasion of the ILP, that had compelled the unions to alter their views on the issue of political action.

Although the manner in which Hardie and MacDonald had taken the initiative had undoubtedly been of some importance, the formation of the LRC did not really mean that the socialists had converted a majority of the unions to their political philosophy. There had scarcely been any need for this in any case. Since the premises of the trade unions and the ILP were hardly distinguishable already, there was ample room for joint action. The difference had been almost entirely on the question of what was expedient, and the unions had now been forced to agree with the ILP on this issue. The industrial labour movement had, of course, never shown any inclination to be attracted to Marxism. But Hardie's socialism, deeply rooted in British working-class attitudes, had never been Marxist either. Although ILP socialism

probably owed a good deal of stimulation and clarification to the emergence of Marxism, which was thus another factor, though a minor one, in the course of development, it was in fact much more a development from the "old unionist"

Radicalism of the seventies. Certainly Hardie had done the Labour movement a notable service and accelerated the inevitable emergence of the Labour Party by giving practical if vague coherence to the workers' aspirations and gathering the advanced forces around his standard. Even his comparative vagueness about the ultimate form of society he desired was a virtue, as it accorded rather well with the natural tendency of the Labour movement proper to empiricism. He too was interested mainly in immediate reforms, declaring them socialist only in order to link them together to form the *raison d'être* of a new party.

What in actuality did Hardie and the Labour movement want? The social and economic forces of the period were in fact mirrored in Hardie's teaching, showing particularly in this very vagueness and empiricism. The reason why he did not draw up a specific plan for the new social order was largely the fact that mere Labour independence - mere self-expression of the working-class - was three-quarters of his creed. "Socialism," he explained, "is not a system of economics, but life for the dying people." Nationalisation

was "a mere incident in the crusade". "The cry" was "still for freedom". This stress upon independence for its own sake, upon the worker winning power to be master of the whole of his own life through obtaining control over the means of production by the democratic state, was surely above all a revolt from the "wage-slavery" that the economic forces were creating, and at the same time an expression of the new self-respect and ambition the worker had acquired from the rise in standards of living. Under socialism, every man would be his own employer. The details of the machinery through which industry was to be governed did not matter yet: they could be worked out when once the primary objective had been attained - when the worker had been put into power.

Although some of the more wary unionists appear to have had their suspicions that trade unions might still be necessary, and might find themselves in difficulties, under state management, (2) this was one of the details that lay far in the future. What probably mattered more at the moment was that the workers had previously looked to the unions as their main defence against "wage-slavery" - a defence that

2. This, of course, was why they were suspicious of state-controlled conciliation and arbitration, which, as has been seen, the ILP tended to support. (Op. Webbs: Industrial Democracy, 558). But, if the Boot and Shoe Operatives are typical, the rank and file seem to have been less conscious of this difficulty than the leaders.

had now been shattered. Mere self-assertiveness is, in fact, probably one of the primary motivating forces of trade unionism. (3) As yet, of course, many of the unionists could not accept all the conclusions that the ILP erected upon the premises they shared with the ILP; but it was surely momentous enough that they could ally with that body.

It was also because of the vital importance to the workers of their desire for mere self-expression that the Fabians had so little influence upon the movement. To the Fabians it was the measures that mattered and scarcely at all the party that enacted and administered them; to the workers, the main objective was to get their own class into power, when the question of measures would take care of itself. Although the Fabians too made their contribution to the movement - a minor one - in helping to clarify, but not creating, the new native-born socialism, they did not appreciate sufficiently the irrational element in political life. They appeared heartless to the Labour men, and were always suspect to them.

On the other hand, the highly moral and emotional character of ILP socialism and of Blatchford's jovial asceticism,

-
3. Webbs: Industrial Democracy (p. 540): "One of the principal grievances that Trade Unions are formed to remedy is the autocratic manner in which the employer, in any unregulated trade, determines at what hours his workshop will open and close, when his work-people shall take their meals or enjoy their holidays, how fast and how continuously they shall work, and a host of petty regulations, easily passing, with a brutal foreman, into gross personal tyranny."

which had won so many converts to the ILP, helped fulfil the new need for religious satisfaction which Beatrice Webb had noticed at Bacup and which was also evident in the Labour Church movement. And, although it was partly a product of the educational revolution and of the decline of nonconformist influence in the fourth quarter of the century, this deep-seated need, an emotional vacuum that had had to be filled, was probably also in part another product of the increasing dehumanisation of industry. Becoming master of the machine, man was to remould the economic system, basing it upon human values, making it more meaningful and more morally satisfying. It was the easier, of course, for the new socialism to claim moral sanction because the workers were the last social class to come to political consciousness. When Labour men demanded a share in the control of government, they claimed to speak on behalf of the great majority of the community.

Another factor in the rise of the independent political movement had been the uncompromisingly class-conscious attitude of the employers, conflicting directly with the tendencies of social development. In her middle-class home Beatrice Webb had sensed that the workers were something less than human: labour was "an abstraction, a commodity." In politics, the local Liberal Associations had thrown away

a remarkable opportunity to attach the workers to their Party.

In industry, the Webbs commented in the nineties:

"... how new and unusual it still is for capitalists and workmen to meet on an equal footing, to recognise each other's representative capacity... Even today in the great majority of trades the masters would think it beneath their dignity voluntarily to confer with the Trade Union leaders on equal terms." (4)

And

"The capitalist is very fond of declaring that labour is a commodity, and the wage contract a bargain of purchase and sale like any other. But he instinctively expects his wage-earners to render him, not only obedience, but also personal deference. If the wage contract is a bargain of purchase and sale like any other, why is the workman expected to touch his hat to his employer...?" (5)

In the light of our later knowledge of the complexity of the problems that had arisen with modern industrial and social development, ILP socialism inevitably seems very crude. But Hardie's emphasis was sound, and his message in tune with its times.

-
4. Webbs: Industrial Democracy, 238.
5. Ibid., 842.

CHAPTER 17.

THE LABOUR REPRESENTATION COMMITTEE
AND THE TAFE VALE DECISION.

Although the decision of the 1899 TUC to co-operate with the socialist societies "to devise ways and means for securing the return of an increased number of Labour members in the next Parliament" clearly marks the beginning of the British Labour Party, it was to be some time yet before the process of establishing the Party was completed. Thus it is necessary to continue this study some years further.

The first step in this process of creating a party was of course the conference in February, 1900, at the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, London, at which the Labour Representation Committee was founded. The story of this conference has often been recounted, but some points may still be emphasised. Acting on the instruction of the Congress, the Parliamentary Committee had set up a sub-committee to meet representatives of the socialist bodies and make arrangements. Possibly because of a belief such as Ashton had expressed at the Congress that nothing would come of the decision, possibly because this is a usual sort of choice to make, the Committee appointed to this body those of its members - W. C. Steadman, Thorne, and K. Bell of the ASRS - who were most favourable to

the idea of determined political action, together with ^{S. Woods} the Liberal M.P. who was President of the Miners' Federation. Thus, when these four met with two representatives each from the three socialist societies - Shaw and Pease for the Fabians, Hardie and MacDonald for the ILP, and Quelch and H. R. Taylor for the SDF - it was natural that the new movement received a vigorous initial impulse. And despite the fact - since both Steadman and Bell tended towards the Lib.-Lab. viewpoint, (1) while Thorne was of course a member of the SDF - that the two ILP men were in a minority, they seem to have retained the initiative. Perhaps this was a result of their position as the middle party; probably it was due to the fact that they came prepared with practical proposals and were astute tacticians. At all events it was this joint committee which summoned the Memorial Hall Conference, and the agenda for that gathering stated the ILP policy. It suggested that action be taken to set up a distinct Labour group in the Commons with its own whips and policy, composed of "men

1. Although a Fabian, Steadman was already a Liberal M.P., for Stepney, and as will be seen both he and Bell were later to prefer to remain with the Liberals. Nevertheless both were staunch workers in the Labour interests and took prominent parts in the formation of the LRC. Moreover, the fact that both were to remain associated with the LRC for some years surely illustrates the difficulty of distinguishing at all clearly between the LRC position and the attitude of the more independent Lib.-Labs.

sympathetic with the aims and demands of the Labour movement." This represented a distinct advance from the TUC resolution, which had not mentioned a separate party, although co-operation with the socialist bodies might be said to have implied this. There was one apparent concession to the TUC: it was suggested that this group might co-operate with other parties if they were promoting measures favourable to the Labour interest. (2)

About half of the more prominent unions were represented at the Conference, including the ASE, the ASRS, the Shipwrights, the Boot and Shoe Operatives, the dockers' unions, the printers, Steel Smelters, Plasterers, and even some of the Lancashire textile unions. The most notable absentees were the great majority of the miners' societies. The trade union delegates were in fact predominant in the Conference, as was only fitting, since they represented 500,000 unionists compared with the combined membership of 22,000 for the three socialist bodies. (3) When the Executive Committee was now made a permanent institution and the ILP and SDF were each given two seats and the Fabians one out of a total of twelve, there was considerable dissatisfaction with

2. TUC circulars, 1900. Cp. F. Williams: Fifty Years, March, 16-7.

3. LRC Conference Report, 1900, 3-7. Steadman was elected to the Chair, and stated he had been a "voluntarist" until his union had been defeated in a strike for reduced hours ten years previously. (p. 10).

this disproportionate representation of the socialists. Nevertheless, this did not reach the point of overturning this arrangement, which had many practical considerations in its favour. (4) And on other matters, for all their numerical preponderance, the trade union delegates seem in fact to have consistently followed the ILP's leadership. For instance, a motion on LEA lines that only working-men candidates be supported was rejected by no less than 102-3 in favour of an amendment that candidates should be "men sympathetic with the aims and demands of the Labour movement": although this amendment had been proposed by Barnes and John Burns, who were both representing the ASE, it was well-known that it expressed the ILP view. (5) In almost every case where there was a clash of opinion, it was the ILP's lead that was followed. (6) On the other hand, despite the fact that it had again by this time become one of the hardy annuals passed every year at the TUC, the familiar socialist objective, proposed now by the SDF, was rejected 59-35. One reason for this curious decision was that the ILP itself had opposed the resolution: although socialist themselves, Hardie

4. Ibid., 13-15.

5. Ibid., 11.

6. There is one apparent instance in which the ILP was defeated - a resolution to report back to the TUC, which was carried 360,000-124,000. Barnes opposed this. (p. 17).

and his followers did not think it politic or necessary at this time to bind the unions to a declaration of socialism - an attitude which of course brought upon them the vituperation of the SDF. Just as significant, perhaps, is the fact that, as at the TUCs, nearly a third of the delegates had abstained from voting on the question. (7)

The Executive Committee, whose members were elected separately by the different sections of delegates they represented, were Frederick Rogers (Vellum Binders), President, (8) Thomas Greenall (Lancashire and Cheshire Miners), Vice-President, Pete Curran (Gasworkers), A. Gee (Yorkshire Textile Workers), John Hodge (Steel Smelters), and A. Wilkie (Shipwrights) - all representatives of the trade unions, Hardie and James Parker, representing the ILP, Harry Quelch and James Macdonald, for the SDF, and E. R. Pease for the Fabian Society. (9) In obtaining the position of Secretary, Ramsay MacDonald stepped into his rightful place in the movement. His skilful and assiduous work as a tactician was to contribute a good deal to the LRC's early success. As yet, however, the

7. Ibid., 12.

8. Rogers was a most interesting figure: for an excellent appreciation see F. Williams: *op. cit.*, 26-7. See also Rogers' own "Labour, Life and Literature".

9. LRC Conference Report, 1900, 1.

LRC was not conceived as a party, but merely as an instrument for co-ordinating the political activities of the various sections of the Labour movement: a circular sent out to the unions suggested only that they promote candidatures in co-operation with the Committee. The LRC did not yet, of course, have any funds to run candidates as an organised party.

In a few months, before it had time to find its feet, the LRC had to take part in the 1900 general election. The results were better, but not very markedly so, than in 1895. Of its 15 candidates, Hardie at Merthyr Tydvil and Bell of the ASRS at Derby were successful, and Hodge and F. W. Jowett were only very narrowly defeated for Gower in South Wales and West Bradford respectively. Of 177,000 votes cast for the seats they had contested, the Committee's candidates had received no fewer than 62,698. Considering all the difficulties, especially the lack of preparation and the disadvantage which "pro-Boer" Labour men had faced in this "khaki" election, there was ground for moderate satisfaction. There had been one hopeful sign: the ILP men had found that the creation of the LRC had resulted in a much more friendly attitude towards them on the part of the trade unionists in the electorates. (10) Bell's victory had been achieved with

a certain amount of support from the Liberals, as he had been returned as the partner of a Liberal candidate for a two-member constituency.

Hardie's success had been gained under rather curious circumstances. Apparently it was due to some extent to the anti-war sentiment in Merthyr, which also returned two Members, as the other successful candidate, the Liberal coal magnate D. A. Thomas (later Lord Rhondda), was also a "pro-Boer". There had also been another Liberal, a "Liberal Imperialist", or supporter of the war policy, among the candidates.

Nevertheless his victory seems to have come as a surprise to Hardie himself, and the bi-lingual South Wales miners' paper "Ilais Ilafur" ("Voice of Labour"), which had paid much more attention to Hodge's campaign in the neighbouring constituency of Gower, confessed itself mystified at the Merthyr result.

In this same election Hardie was also contesting Preston in Lancashire, which polled two days before Merthyr. He devoted all his time to Preston, where he was badly defeated, and came to Wales less than 24 hours before polling. (11) He was to hold this seat at Merthyr for the rest of his life. Perhaps he had underestimated the impression his impassioned addresses had made on the Welsh miners when he had taken part in an ILP lecturing campaign in the valleys during the strike of 1898;

11. Ilais Ilafur, Sept.-Nov., 1900.

but it is often claimed that the miners had not forgotten him. (12)

When the LRC gathered again at the end of its first year for the 1901 Conference, it was found that many of the unions represented at the inaugural meeting had not affiliated. Forty-one unions had joined, but most of them were small societies. The largest were the ASRS, the Gasworkers, the Boot and Shoe Operatives, the Ironfounders, the Steel Smelters, the Shipwrights, the Typographical Association, the London Compositors, the two unions of dockers, the Blastfurnacemen and the Brassworkers. The membership of the affiliated trade unions (excluding the seven trades councils that had joined) totalled 350,000; of the socialist section 25,000. (13)

Does this mean that the LRC had been set up prematurely? This is a difficult question to answer; but one or two points can be made. The figure for membership of affiliated unions compares reasonably well with the membership of about 390,000 for the General Federation of Trade Unions at this time. And if the 450,000 miners and 100,000 cotton operatives be deducted from the total Trades Union Congress membership of about 1,200,000, it amounts to a considerable proportion of

12. Llais Llafur, Oct. 20; see also Jack Jones: Unfinished Journey, 88.

13. LRC Conference Report, 1901, 3-5.

the remainder. Although few of the largest unions had affiliated, most of what might be called the second grade had joined. It will be remembered from Chapter 15 that the ASE had balloted its members, but the response had been so poor that the Council had decided to take no action. For some unexplained reason - possibly connected with the ruling that the permanent officers of the Society were not to be eligible as candidates, which of course excluded all its leading men - it did not follow the usual practice of taking a second ballot and exhorting the branches to show more interest. Perhaps this lack of marked enthusiasm was fairly typical. Possibly the fact that there was little prospect of another general election for the next five years and the unfavourable war atmosphere were also partly responsible for the failure of the ASE and other unions to show a greater sense of urgency in the matter.

The SDF were again represented at the 1901 Conference, but on their renewed attempt to secure the adoption of the socialist objective again receiving virtually no support, (14) they withdrew their affiliation shortly afterwards. This of course was only to be expected: as Marxists they could hardly remain members of a genuinely working-class organisation for very long.

In 1901 the whole temper of the Labour movement altered with the Taff Vale decision. As it has so often been treated at length, (15) there is no need to discuss this famous verdict in detail here. It appeared to mark the virtual extinction of trade unionism: if union funds were to be liable for civil damages, the workers would be stripped at a blow of all their industrial weapons. Although legally sound, the judgment came as a surprise even to the lawyers. To the workers it seemed manifestly unjust: injury inflicted upon each other by rival firms in the ordinary course of competition was not to be actionable, yet any economic pressure exerted by the unions was. Moreover it appeared to the workers to be the culmination of the steady counter-campaign against unionism begun by the employing-class in the early nineties with the formation of employers' federations and the use of free labour. (16)

This movement, partly at least a reaction against the mounting ambition of the unions, had seemed to continue in the form of an increasing harshness in legal decisions, and had found expression just previously in a famous series of articles in The Times on "The Crisis in British Industry", which unscrupulously placed all the blame upon the unions for the nation's gradual loss of

15. See particularly the Webbs: History of Trade Unionism (1920 ed.), 600-8; G. D. H. Cole: Short History of the British Working-Class Movement, 292-6.

16. For the "inside story" of the Free Labour movement, see W. Collison: The Apostle of Free Labour.

predominance in world trade. In the past the unions had relied upon a measure of fair play, if little favour; now it appeared to them that they were not to get even this. (17)

Ironically, this threatening extension of the state towards them was from one aspect part of the civilising process - the inevitable spread of the rule of law in social activity through the growing recognition of corporate responsibility - that had contributed in large measure to the rise and increasing acceptance of collectivist thought. It was becoming recognised that freedom lies somewhere short of anarchy, and trade unionism was becoming an anachronous survival from the anarchical period - what is more uncivilised as a method of deciding economic questions than resort to a strike? Yet what freedom could the workers have without legal sanction for the use of their industrial weapons? It had become obvious and urgent that the unions must take a greater part in controlling the development of the body of law.

As was shown by the TUC debates in September, less than two months after the delivery of the decision by the House of Lords, the unionists appreciated the gravity of their position almost immediately. But for some time their reactions were confused, and they found it very difficult to decide what

17. See esp. P. Mantoux and M. Alfassa: *La Crise du Trade Unionisme*, esp. 180ff.

counter-measures to take. As a collectivist, Webb half bowed to the judgment, and thus, after adding to the bewilderment of the unions, further lost their confidence. At the other extreme of the movement, Blatchford, the sentimentalist, was also favourable at first, arguing that in return the unions would now be able to sue the employers, but soon changed his mind when the reality was impressed on him. But even Bell wavered too, his first impulse, quickly rectified, being to support Blatchford. Moreover, some time elapsed before the unionists knew what the attitude of the Liberals was going to be. Although the first suggestion of the leading lawyers of the Liberal Party, Asquith, Haldane and Sir Robert Reid, that each union should divide into two separate associations for trade and benefit purposes seemed plausible for a time, it was soon seen that it would result in too great a sacrifice of reserve strength. In addition, it would signify acceptance of the decision, which the unionists deeply resented, and would give no real protection in the industrial sphere. (18)

When the 1902 Conference of the LRC was held in January at Birmingham, the membership of its trade union section had already risen from 353,070 to 455,450. In view of the fact that the unionists had scarcely made up their minds as yet about the steps to be taken to rectify their legal position

and did not yet know what the attitude of the Liberals was going to be, it is possible to doubt that the Taff Vale judgment was the sole cause of these accessions. In place of the 41 unions of the previous year there were now 65; and the number of Trades Councils affiliated had risen from seven to 21. Practically all of these accessions, however, were small societies, the largest being the Operative Plasterers, with about 12,000 members. The increase in the number of Trades Councils had been due largely to the reduction of the previous Trades Council subscription of £5 for every 25,000 members - which, since most of them were very weak financially, had deterred them - to £1 for one delegate and ten shillings for each further delegate. The affiliation of the Councils was obviously an important gain for a political organisation. (19)

At the very beginning of the proceedings, the fact was illustrated that there were still some prominent figures in the movement who did not regard the LRC as representing the policy of complete independence. In his opening address, the President, W. J. Davis, of the Brassworkers, a member of the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC, listed a number of Liberal-Labour successes as Labour victories. (20) In a later

19. LRC Conference Report, 1902, 3-7. For Trades Councils' subscriptions, *ibid.*, 1900, 18; 1901, 16.

20. *Ibid.*, 1902, 12-6. Davis is another example of a Labour politician whom it is difficult to place on either side of the fence dividing Lib-Labs and independent Labour men. He had been a Liberal City Councillor in Birmingham, but

session a motion was carried censuring trade union officials who had spoken in opposition to LRC candidates; (21) and there was also a long discussion on the education question that had come to the forefront in national politics at that time. As the speakers all saw eye to eye with the Liberals this discussion seemed hardly necessary. (22) Yet on the other hand there were signs that a party was emerging. When the setting-up of a common election fund was discussed, the proposal won support on this occasion from many unionists and not merely, as previously, from the Fabians and ILP. Several speakers stressed the point that it would mean the creation of a party in place of a mere joint committee, and the executive were eventually instructed to draft a scheme. (23)

Possibly this development was a result of the Taff Vale decision. Nevertheless this question, which was discussed at length by the Conference, does not seem to have been regarded even yet as one of great urgency. Misled apparently by the universal surprise with which the judgment had been received, many union leaders still seemed to believe that it

20 (Contd.).

had taken up a very independent attitude. He played a prominent part in arranging the agreement between the LRC and the TUC regarding Lib-Lab candidacies in 1905.
See W. A. Dalley: The Life Story of W. J. Davis.

21. LRC Conference Report, 1902, 25.

22. Ibid., 26ff.

23. Ibid., 21.

was going to be rectified with little difficulty. Even the LRC Executive Committee gave it little attention in their report, explaining in fact that they regarded it as being still "sub judice" in a sense and confining themselves to the general assertion that

"Menaced on every hand in workshop, court of law and press, Trade Unionism has no refuge except the ballot box and Labour representation." (24)

Although, as Hardie now revealed, the Labour members of Parliament had offered their services to the TUC Parliamentary Committee on the matter, the Committee had preferred to approach some Liberal lawyers. Following Hardie, Davis rose to explain that the Committee looked on the question as being purely a legal matter, the result of an unforeseen defect in the law, to be remedied in the 1875 manner. It was not yet seen, apparently, as a momentous issue in class politics. (25) In fact it seems to have been only in May, 1902, when the subject was first discussed in the Commons, that the unions realised they were not going to get much help from the Liberals. Although the remedy appeared simple enough to the unionists, the Liberals revealed scruples, incomprehensible to the workers, over returning the unions to a position of legal irresponsibility.

24. LRC Conference Report, 1902, 12.

25. Ibid., 24.

In addition, however, to this belated uncertainty over the Taff Vale verdict, it appears that the difficulty that the war was still being fought was also an important factor delaying the onset of the LRC's tide of success. In September, 1901, Robert Smillie had been badly defeated in a by-election at Lanark, the handicap imposed by the presence of the large Irish element in the constituency being scarcely diminished by the support he received from well-known anti-imperialists. Then in January, 1902, at Dewsbury the LRC were forestalled upon the scene by Quelch of the SDF and had to stand aside. Quelch was also badly defeated. In March Philip Snowden fared little better at Wakefield. Again the war fever seemed to dominate the campaign and to be the main cause of his defeat. (26)

On June 1, simultaneously with the clarification of the position regarding the Taff Vale judgment, the peace was signed. Almost overnight the country seemed to cast off imperialism, and the whole situation was transformed. In the same month a vacancy occurred for the seat of Clitheroe in Lancashire. Immediately the local ILP branch invited Snowden to contest it, and he accepted. Almost as quickly, however, sensing the opportunity for a telling stroke,

26. LRC Conference Report, 1902, 7; Halévy, 241-2; P. Snowden: An Autobiography, 107-111.

Ramsay MacDonald persuaded him to stand down in favour of D. J. Shackleton, a Secretary of the Weavers, who was offered the full support of the LRC. In face of the solid support of all the local trade unions, neither of the other parties could find a candidate to oppose him, so that he was returned without a ballot. Although Shackleton was never a socialist and tended in fact to be Lib-Lab in his views, this manoeuvre resulted in the accession to the LRC of the Lancashire textile unions, thus providing a notable lead to those of the other "old" unions that were still hesitant. (Nevertheless, although the unions seem to have been quick to grasp the significance of Shackleton's success, many of the Liberal provincial journals apparently claimed it as their victory.) (27)

27. LRC Conference Report, 1903, 13; Halévy, 242-3. It was in the middle of the nineties that the cotton operatives had first begun to show a desire for Labour representation; but they had not reached the independent point of view at this time. Previously their United Textile Factory Workers' Association, which existed only to combine the cotton unions for political activities, had worked with the employers on many issues, such as the closer regulation of the formation of limited liability companies, but had bitterly opposed them on such questions as the extension of the Factory Acts. Although fairly satisfied with the results obtained up till 1892, the Association became very discontented after that year, and this discontent culminated in a ballot in 1894 in which by 40,805 to 37,752 the members decided in favour of endeavouring to send some of their own men to Parliament. The proposals for obtaining this object that were then drawn up by the executive suggested, however, that this be done "by arrangement with the two principal political parties." A special

The new vigour that had entered the IRC was obvious when its 1903 Conference gathered in January at Newcastle.

The trade union membership had almost doubled since the previous conference, having reached the figure of 847, 315 members of 127 unions, and there were now 49 Trades Councils affiliated compared with the 21 of 1902. (28) Among the accessions were some of the largest unions, including the ASE, the Amalgamated Carpenters and the Boilermakers, in addition to the cotton operatives' societies. (29) In his opening address, J. N. Bell of the National Amalgamated Union of Labour, who was President on this occasion, probably made a fair analysis of the causes of this rapid growth, and incidentally stressed the unionist view of the Tariff Vale decision as a malicious attack on the part of the employers.

27. (Contd.) delegate meeting was called in February, 1895, to discuss these; but there was considerable dissension, so that the project was dropped. Nevertheless Mawdsley continued to exhort the members that if they wanted their measures enacted they must be more active in ensuring that men who favoured them were returned to Westminster. He also admitted, however, "We have better laws and administration than any other section of workers." In 1896 it was decided to disband the Association on the ground that it was not justifying its expense. (Reports and Circulars of the Association, Webb Collection). Mawdsley ran as a Conservative in an Oldham by-election in 1898, being defeated by a small majority. Snowden (op. cit., 104) claims that even before this by-election some local branches of the textile unions in the district were already affiliated to the IRC.

28. IRC Conference Report, 1903, 9.

29. Ibid., 3-5.

when he asserted:

"In attacking us with so much vigour our opponents have indeed made a false move. They have called into play forces that might possibly have remained dormant for years." (30)

Yet in some respects these newly affiliated unions were an embarrassment. The old question of the degree of independence the LRC should keep in its relations with the Liberal Party, of which practically nothing had been heard at the 1901 and 1902 Conferences, was now raised again in a long heated debate in which several representatives of newly acceded unions, notably the cotton operatives' societies and Boilermakers, opposed the policy of rigid independence. A delegate of the Power Loom Operatives actually moved that the ILP be expelled, but this suggestion was heavily defeated. More support, however, was given to W. E. Clery of the Fawcett Association when he defended his action of having allowed a Liberal Association to bring him forward as a candidate before his nomination by the LRC had been completed: several delegates could not see the point of carrying independence further than this. Clery himself was actually in favour of permitting Liberal Associations to affiliate to the LRC; and Freak of the Boot and Shoe Operatives was one of many speakers who thought that at the least they should be less exacting of

30. LRC Conference Report, 1903, 21.

candidates. It was difficult, in fact, to define the independent policy satisfactorily, especially to express the policy in rules of conduct that would cover all likely contingencies, as there was no necessity or desire to refuse Liberal support when it was offered. The ILP view was, however, adopted. Clery and his party were defeated 48-118, and a resolution on the same subject apparently sponsored by the ILP was carried later after another confused debate by 659,000 to 154,000 card votes. (31)

On the other hand when it was again moved - despite the fact that the SDF was no longer affiliated - that the socialist objective be adopted, this irrepressible proposal was rejected only 291,000 - 295,000. (32) But, as usual, about a third of the delegates had abstained from voting. And, in accordance with the Executive's recommendation, a voluntary political fund was now set up, to be raised by a levy of a penny a year for each member of the affiliated bodies. In the course of the debate on this fund, Arthur Henderson, who was present at the Conference for the first time and was now elected Treasurer, had protested that only a levy of fourpence would suffice. (33)

Following the Conference, there were further, more striking victories in the 1903 by-elections. As nothing

31. LRC Conference Report, 1903, 23-29, 32.

32. Ibid., 36.

33. Ibid., 34-5.

appealed to the unions more than success, these greatly strengthened the IRC's position within the industrial movement. The first was won in March at Woolwich. For fifteen years Woolwich had been a safe Conservative seat which in 1900 the Liberals had not even attempted to contest. Now, however, when it again became vacant, the local Labour Association, a body which had not affiliated to the IRC or any other organisation, invited Will Crooks, the good-natured and immensely popular cooper who was a Progressive member of the London County Council and Labour Mayor of Poplar, to fight the seat. Although not even Hardie himself could surpass Crooks in his uncompromising pursuit of working-class interests, he was Radical more than anything else in his views, and could not see the point of the Independent policy. (Nevertheless he had been able to work in close co-operation in Poplar with Lansbury of the SDF; he is still another Labour politician whose views defy classification). But his sponsors had very meagre funds. Crooks therefore appealed to the IRC, which gave him full support. Curiously, there does not appear to have been much reference to the Taff Vale decision in his campaign: the question of protection which had just come to the forefront in national politics was made almost the sole issue of the contest, thousands of tiny baked

"large" and "small" loaves serving as the symbols of Crooks's supporters. On March 11 he was declared the victor amidst remarkable enthusiasm by the striking majority of 8687-5438. (34)

Taking place as it did in London on this rising national issue, this contest was followed by the whole country. Three months later, the LRC added another success which also attracted a considerable amount of attention. On this occasion the constituency was Barnard Castle in Yorkshire, long regarded as a Liberal stronghold. For some years Arthur Henderson, who combined this political work with the paid position of District Delegate for the Ironfounders, had been employed as agent to the sitting Member, who now died. In January, however, Henderson had already accepted an invitation from the LRC to stand for the seat on its behalf at the next contest. He was now approached by the Liberals, but astounded them by rejecting their offer, explaining that he was already in the field. A Conservative was also standing, and after some hesitation the Liberals also brought forward a candidate. Again, though Henderson also stressed the Taff Vale grievance in his speeches, the tariff issue was very important in the campaign. The Liberal was not a Free Trader, but supported Balfour's middle-position of "enquiry"; Henderson was strongly

34. LRC Conference Report, 1903, 19; Halévy, 243-7;
G. Haw: From Workhouse to Westminster: The Life Story
of Will Crooks, M.P., 186ff.

opposed to Chamberlain's proposals, and received the support of a large part of the Liberal press. He won narrowly, with the Liberal at the foot of the poll. The voting was 3370 for Henderson, 3323 for the Conservative, and 2809 for the Liberal. (35)

There were two other contests in which the LRC took part in this same year, both unsuccessful, but one at least giving further evidence of advance. In May John Hodge of the British Steel Smelters was defeated for Preston by 8639-6490. Fighting under the disadvantage that the returning officer had permitted only five days for the campaign, he had greatly reduced the adverse majority of 4000 by which Hardie had been beaten in the same electorate in 1900. In December G. H. Roberts came last in a three-cornered contest at Norwich. It was pleaded, however, that the constituency was unpromising for a Labour candidate. Moreover, this was a further contest that was dominated by the tariff issue, and on this occasion the Liberal was a Free Trader. (36)

By raising the question of the relations of the LRC with the Liberals in its most difficult form, this Norwich election helped to clarify the issue of independence.

Practically all Labour politicians were ardent supporters of free trade: were they to regard Labour's special interests

35. M. A. Hamilton: Arthur Henderson.

36. LRC Conference Report, 1904, 19-20.

as being important enough to justify intervention in contests where the Liberal candidate was a Free Trader and thus endanger his return? On this occasion Bell thought not. Although he had been so prominent in the formation of the IRC, he had always tended towards the Liberal-Labour viewpoint; and he now went so far as to give support to the Liberal candidate and send him a message of congratulation after his victory. It was necessary, of course, for the IRC to take disciplinary action. The first steps were taken at the 1904 Conference, when the question was referred to the ASRS; but as Bell had done excellent work for the railwaymen in the Commons, particularly in blocking a bill which would have enabled one of the companies to force its employees to join a pensions scheme and deal a serious blow to the union, they were loathe to disavow him, and had not done so by the time of the 1904 TUC. The matter was then raised again, but Bell happened to be President of the TUC of that year, and ruled it out of order - thus, incidentally, establishing the point that the IRC was to be responsible for its own policy. In 1905 the IRC demanded that the ASRS force him to pledge allegiance to its constitution: when he refused to sign the pledge, the Society gave him a free hand but consented to his being withdrawn from the list of IRC candidates. (37)

37. *Ibid.*, 20; G. W. Alcock: *Fifty Years of Railway Trade Unionism*, 320-1.

Although the free trade question created the most difficulty, it was only one among several of the most prominent issues of the time - imperialism, liquor licensing, the Chinese labour in the Transvaal, and education - on which the Labour movement strongly approved of the Liberal viewpoint. There can be little doubt that the sequence of Labour successes in by-elections was due very largely to the general tide that was flowing in the Liberal direction. As there was an unusual number of by-elections at this time, this movement of opinion could be clearly seen, the Unionist majority in the Commons being actually reduced from 134 to 74 even before the 1906 election. (It was probably this pronounced general movement that obscured the rise of the LRC so that its success in 1906 seems to have come as a surprise to most observers.) The danger arose, therefore, that the workers would come to regard the Taff Vale grievance as the only issue dividing them from the Liberals. After the 1906 victory, in fact, Shackleton thought it necessary to warn them - not on socialist grounds, but merely because a separate party was needed for the protection of trade union interests, and because it avoided the previous difficulty that a direction from union leaders to support either of the other parties always aroused dissension from a large section of their membership - that they must be careful not to revert to the old party divisions as soon as

the Tariff Vale Judgment had been rectified. (38) In the attempt to combat these difficulties, the IRC published three pamphlets in the latter half of 1903, specifically to point out that in favouring free trade they were not intending to imply support of the free enterprise economic system. And later conferences thrashed out again in the light of further experience the precise form that independent action should take.

The general resurgence of Liberalism did not, of course, account for the continued growth of the LRC. At the 1904 Conference, at Bradford, it was found that 956,000 trade unionists were now affiliated (the number of unionists represented at the 1904 TUC was 1,423,000), and if this total represented only a twelve per cent increase over the figure for the previous year, this was only because, apart from the miners, who were themselves amassing their forces with equal enthusiasm, there were virtually no more worlds to conquer. The number of Trades Councils joining the movement had also increased again from 49 to 76. And the list of candidates sponsored by the unions was beginning to grow in preparation for the coming election. (39)

Significantly, contribution to the Parliamentary Fund was now made compulsory: the Labour Party was virtually in

38. LRC Conference Report, 1906, 68.

39. Ibid., 1904, 12, 18.

existence. (40) And on this occasion a delegate who moved that the IIP be excluded was unable to find even a seconder. (41) Although the TUC Parliamentary Committee was still attempting to make use of Liberal M.P.s to right the Tarr Vale decision, the Conference revealed that it was solidly in favour of the policy of independence by strongly supporting the Executive's unrelenting attitude regarding Bell's action at Norwich. (42) There was a further debate on the form of the pledge to be signed by IRC candidates; but this turned largely upon a difficulty that had emerged in practice. Since it had virtually banned unionists from any sort of political activity in electorates where there were no IRC candidates, the form adopted in 1903 appeared to prohibit them from obtaining undertakings from the candidates of the other parties to vote for the IRC's Trades Disputes Bill - the measure that had been prepared for the purpose of rectifying the Tarr Vale judgment - which was a most inconvenient restriction. It also forbade activity in support of free trade; and in fact, in addition to Bell, Crooks and Henderson had refused to sign it. Although the rigidity of the pledge was now, with Hardie's approval, slightly relaxed on this point, this did not imply any real relaxation of the

40. IRC Conference Report, 1904, 40.

41. Ibid., 37.

42. Ibid., 43.

independent policy. (In the event, as the later history of the Trades Disputes Bill showed, it was very fortunate that this form of activity had been provided for.) By its spirit and general tone the Conference showed the LRC to be more confident and united than it had yet been. (43)

Following the Conference, two of the list of approved candidates, John Ward of the Navvies and W. G. Steadman, who both tended towards the Lib-Lab position, refused to sign the necessary written undertaking to observe the LRC constitution, despite the relaxation of its provisions. The Executive therefore excluded them from the official list. To a request from the ASRS that Bell and three other candidates be endorsed a similar reply was made -- that they would be added to the LRC list when they signed the declaration -- and it was this stipulation that eventually led to Bell's expulsion. The other three ASRS nominees conformed. (44) Apparently because no vacancies occurred in the constituencies its candidates were nursing, the LRC took no further part in by-elections during the next two years. It did, however, in 1904 support two miners' candidates who were not sponsored by the Miners' Federation: John Robertson in North East Lanark, who shared the fate of the previous Labour candidates in that county in failing to win the Irish vote, and T. Richards in West Monmouth,

43. LRC Conference Report, 1904, 47, 50-1.
44. Ibid., 1905, 22-3.

who was not opposed by the Liberals and was returned. (45)

At the 1905 Conference, held at Liverpool, the increased coherence of the movement and its firmly independent tone were again evident. Once again, on the motion of an ASRS delegate seconded by W. Matkin of the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners, the attempt was made to exclude all but the trade unions from the organisation. Although support was given, curiously and perhaps significantly, by Isaac Mitchell of the ASE, himself a socialist, who contended that the interests of the unions and the socialists were different and that they should work in close co-operation rather than amalgamation, the proposal was heavily defeated on a show of hands, the chairman not even troubling to count the vote. (46) Again too there were complaints that the provisions laid down for preserving the position of independence were rather too strict. That the problem was in fact a most difficult one was well illustrated during the debate by James Sexton who pointed out how ungrateful it seemed for the Liverpool dockers to withhold support from T.P. O'Connor, who had done an immense amount of excellent work for them in the Commons. But in a most clearly-argued and persuasive speech Hardie now put his finger on the crux of the matter, showing full appreciation of Sexton's difficulty but contending that it

45. LRC Conference Report, 1905, 26-7.

46. Ibid., 45.

was vitally important to avoid any appearance of compromising their independence. No-one else could have analysed the position with such statesmanship. He carried the Conference with him: the constitution was supported by 594,000 votes to 24,000. (47)

Another proposal arising from sectional interests was met with the same firmness: some unions with political funds of their own sought exemption from contributing to the Parliamentary Fund, but this was refused. (As the LRC contributed only a quarter of candidates' election expenses, these separate funds could still be put to good use). And at last the Fund was mounting into a real source of strength. At the beginning of 1904 it had stood at £2,260; £4,491 had been contributed during the year, and the balance was now £6,082. (48)

Shortly after the Conference, in February, an attempt was made to minimise another long-standing practical difficulty. At a special conference with the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC an agreement was reached on the terms under which the LRC could be expected to give some support to Liberal-Labour candidates. In effect the agreement recognised that the

difference between these and LRC candidates was merely a

47. LRC Conference Report, 1905, 47-8.

48. Ibid., 30, 35.

difference of opinion on the question of tactics, but it carefully preserved the LRC's position of independence. Each case was to be judged on its merits; the LRC was to support trade union candidates adhering to the TUC programme "in so far as its constitution allows"; and refusal to give support in any particular case was not to be deemed "disloyalty" to the Labour movement. In short, all aid was to be given short of any action that could be construed as support of the Liberal Party. (49)

Thus Hardie's long crusade moved to its climax. In December, 1905, Parliament dissolved. In the election of January, 1906, when the Liberals won one of the most momentous victories of modern times, turning their minority of 74 into a majority of 130 over all other parties combined, the LRC returned no fewer than 29 of its 50 candidates. What had seemed only an idle dream six years previously had come true: incredibly, Labour had a party of its own in the Commons, and had become a real political force. The 28 ILP candidates of 1895 had received a total of 35,397 votes; in 50 constituencies on this occasion the LRC had won 120,205. In addition, there were also in the new House no fewer than 25 Liberal-Labour Members who would vote solidly with the LRC men on almost every issue.

It has often been stated that this spectacular success astounded the party politicians. Many of the rank and file of the parties and the political journalists may well have been taken by surprise; but this is surely not true of the political leaders. Evidence that they sensed what was about to happen is found in the attitude of the Liberal Party during the contest, for of the 50 LRC candidates no fewer than 32 had not been opposed by the Liberals. Moreover, in many of the remaining electorates the opposition to the LRC men had been due to the action of the local Liberal Association, against the advice of the Party head office. It has already been seen that as early as the 1880's Gladstone and Schnadhorst had sensed the rise of this new tide in the national life; and now at last, too belatedly for the future good fortune of Liberalism, some but not all of the local Associations had taken heed. As Hardie had foreseen would be the case, it had been Liberal intransigence more than anything else that had set the tide in motion.

It is true, certainly, that the LRC's spectacular success had been part of the great Liberal victory. Of the 29 successful LRC men, 24 - almost all - had been among the 32 unopposed by Liberals. And the LRC was ready to support the Liberal government in almost its entire programme. But this did not mean that the Committee's position of strict

independence had been in any way compromised; and it is surely just as significant that in the 18 contests against Liberals it had won 5 successes. If the Liberals cleared the path and gave support, their aid was accepted; but this did not signify any compromise on the part of the LRC, which gave no support in return, and made no alteration to its programme. Its attitude was still the same as Hardie's had been in 1887. It acted "irrespective of the convenience of either political party". It was not Labour that had retreated, but the Liberals. And if the Labour platform of immediate measures was almost identical with that of the Liberals, it was also a fact that the Labour men sincerely believed in the necessity of its every plank. (50)

It was not long before the new determination of the organised Labour movement made itself felt in the House. It became very obvious when, shortly after the new Parliament had met, the Government introduced its Trades Disputes Bill. An attempt to rectify the grievance of the unions by redefining the law of agency, this measure would have preserved their new status as corporate bodies under the law, but attempted to exempt their peaceable industrial activities from actions for

50. For results, see *ibid.*, 4; G. D. H. Cole: *British Working-class Politics*, 281-6. On the degree of tacit collaboration between the LRC and the Liberals, see Cole, 180-1.

damages. In the second reading on March 28, the Liberal lawyers explained that this was as far as they could go. The legal mind, they stated, could not countenance the creation of irresponsible agencies within the state: they could not give the unions anomalous, unlimited civil powers. (51)

But the unionists were not to be put off with these half-real phrases. Their long experience of the bias of the courts, of the gulf that lay between legal theory and practice, told them that however well intentioned Parliament might be, it was impossible to frame the law so as to secure the unions any freedom of action unless they were unequivocally exempted from all civil liability whatever. In addition to the government measure the LRC were pressing forward a bill of their own on these broader lines. When this latter measure came up for its second reading two days later, the Government were astounded by the number of their own Members who one by one rose to announce that they were pledged specifically to its principle. A similar declaration was made for the whole of the Irish party, whose spokesman explained that

"Their reason for so doing was clear. They recognised they had in the Labour Party in this House, and in the country, a body of men friendly towards the political aspirations and social needs of Ireland."

And they were also joined by some Members of the Opposition

who confessed that they too had pledged their vote to the unions. One speaker probably voiced the feelings of the unionists rather well when he asserted that they should pay less heed to the quibbles of the lawyers - after all, was not Parliament there to make the law?

It was a most convincing demonstration that the influence of the Labour movement in the recent election was not to be measured only by the number of Members it had returned to the House, though that was testimony enough, but had also been felt in very many other electorates. Hardie now pressed home the point by rising to draw attention to the fact that of all the Liberal speakers only two, one of them being Sir John Walton, the Attorney-General, had not supported the Labour as opposed to the Government bill, and then proceeding to quote from Walton's election posters and speeches to show that he too had committed himself on the issue. The battle was won. The premier, Campbell-Bannerman, followed Hardie to announce that, since the Labour movement were so determined on their own measure, the Government bill would be remodelled according to their principle. Thus the Labour bill was taken no further, and when the Government bill reached the committee stage, the operative clause of the Labour draft was inserted. (52)

Had the Government been sincere in their earlier misgivings, or had these been merely a cloak to rationalise employers' interests? In the debate at the committee stage, twitted by the Opposition, Asquith and Walton attempted to justify the abandonment of their scruples by pointing to the good record of the unions in the past. Although, they declared, they still preferred their own measure as being sounder from a legal viewpoint, they were prepared to trust the unions not to abuse the exceptional privilege granted them, in view of the fact that they had not abused it under the Act of 1875. (53) Rationalisations need not, of course, be insincere; but in any case their explanation, if doctrinaire, seems to be genuine enough - it is easy to admit the point that trade unions and the right to strike that is their foundation are an anomaly in a civilised community. In giving way, the Liberals had probably acted partly at least from realisation that although their own proposed remedy might preserve the legal facade, it did not in reality grant the unions the measure of security that was not too much for them to ask, and which did not cause serious difficulties in practice. Their inability to see this reality in the first place may have been due to lack of appreciation of the workers' viewpoint. But surely Asquith and Walton knew well

enough the ingenuity of their own profession that would readily find a path through all their fine definitions. It seems more than doubtful that they would ever have capitulated, or ever have been brought to see the realism of the unionists' point of view (as it was they had stated they were still not completely convinced) but for the sheer determination and strength of the Labour demand.

Thus the unionists' own analysis of the situation had been vindicated; their instinctive reaction had been sound. It was only too true, as they had come to realise, that only vehement action on the parliamentary plane could secure their interests. They could not afford to leave politics to the other classes. And, in addition to demonstrating again the class-barrier between them and the Liberals, this striking success of 1906 consecrated the policy of determined independent political action in their eyes. There was never much possibility after 1906 that they would revert to the old strategy of caution in politics, which had been based upon the belief, mistaken perhaps but by no means altogether unjustifiable, that they had more to fear than to hope for from a general interference of Parliament in the field of industrial relations. Previously they had preferred to rely mainly on their industrial resources; but a large number of unions had already become dissatisfied with these when the Taff Vale

judgment had confirmed them in their decision, and helped to finally convince the remainder, that the vigorous use of political methods had become a necessity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

(For purposes of general convenience, a rough classification has been used, but overlapping is very considerable. As a general rule, pamphlets have not been included here, but are cited in chapter references).

GENERAL SECONDARY WORKS:

- M. Beer: A History of British Socialism, 1919.
- J. Clayton: The Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain, 1884-1924, 1924.
- G. D. H. Cole: British Working-Class Politics, 1832-1914, 1941.
- G. D. H. Cole: A Short History of the British Working-Class Movement, 1789-1947 (1948 ed.).
- G. D. H. Cole and R. Postgate: The Common People, 1746-1938, 1938.
- M. Cole: Makers of the Labour Movement, 1948.
- G. (Lord) Elton: England Arise, 1931.
- R. C. K. Ensor: England, 1870-1914, 1936.
- E. Halévy: A History of the English People, Epilogue, 1895-1905, (Penguin Books, 1939).
- E. J. Hobsbawm: Labour's Turning Point, 1948.
- W. K. Lamb: British Labour and Parliament, 1865-93 (unpublished thesis in the University of London, 1933).
- H. Lynd: England in the Eighteen-eighties, 1946.
- A. Métin: Le Socialisme en Angleterre, 1897.
- H. Tracey (ed.): The Book of the Labour Party, 1926.
- S. and B. Webb: The History of Trade Unionism (various editions; all references are to 1920 ed.).
- S. and B. Webb: Industrial Democracy, 1897.
- F. Williams: Fifty Years, March, 1950.

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN THE SEVENTIES:

Primary:

Broadhurst Correspondence (British Library of Political Science).
 Howell Papers (Bishopsgate Institute) (items are cited in chapter references).
 Trades Union Congresses, Reports of the Annual.

Secondary:

- J. Arch: The Story of His Life, told by Himself, 1898.
 C. F. Brand: British Labour's Rise to Power, 1941.
 H. Broadhurst: The Story of His Life, told by Himself, 1901.
 G. D. H. Cole: British Trade Unionism in the Third Quarter of the Nineteenth Century (International Review for Social History, II, 1937).
 C. E. Fussell: From Tolpuddle to TUC, 1948.
 W. Hasbach: A History of the English Agricultural Labourer, 1907.
 G. J. Holyoake: Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life, 1892.
 G. Howell: Conflicts of Capital and Labour, 1890 ed.
 G. Howell: Labour Legislation, Labour Movements, and Labour Leaders, 1902.
 A. W. Humphrey: Robert Applegarth, 1915.
 R. W. Postgate: The Builders' History, 1924.
 F. W. Soutter: Recollections of a Labour Pioneer, 1923.
 D. Torr (ed.): Marx-Engels: Selected Correspondence, 1846-95, 1936.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:**Primary:**

- Royal Commission on the Depression of Trade and Industry, Report, 1886.
 Census Reports, 1881, 1891, 1901.
 Second Series of Memoranda, etc., prepared in the Board of Trade on British and Foreign Trade and Industrial Conditions (Cd 2337), 1904.

Secondary:

- G. C. Allen: The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country, 1929.
 H. L. Beales: The 'Great Depression' in Industry and Trade (Economic History Review, V, 65, 1934).
 A. L. Bowley: Wages and Income Since 1860, 1937.
 D. L. Burn: The Economic History of Steel Making, 1867-1939, 1940.
 T. H. Burnham and G. O. Hoskins: Iron and Steel in England, 1870-1930, 1943.
 S. J. Chapman: The Lancashire Cotton Industry, 1904.
 J. H. Clapham: The Economic History of Modern Britain, II and III, 1933.
 J. H. Clapham: The Woollen and Worsted Industries, 1907.
 H. Cox (ed.): British Industries Under Free Trade, 1903.
 M. Dobb: Studies in the Development of Capitalism, 1946.
 C. R. Fay: Great Britain from Adam Smith to the Present Day, 1928.
 F. W. Galton (ed.): Workers on their Industries, 1895.
 J. B. Jeffreys: Trends in Business Organisation in Great Britain since 1856... (unpublished thesis in the University of London, 1938).
 G. T. Jones: Increasing Return, 1933.

- J. Kuczynski: A Short History of Labour Conditions under Industrial Capitalism, I, 1942.
- (Sir) W. T. Layton and G. Crowther: An Introduction to the Study of Prices, 1935 ed.
Oxford University Institute of Statistical Studies, Bulletin, 1948.
- W. W. Rostow: British Economy of the Nineteenth Century, 1948.
- D. F. Schloss: Methods of Industrial Remuneration, 1894 ed.
- (Sir) H. L. Smith: Migration of Labour (Transactions I, Political Economy Circle, National Liberal Club, 1890).
- D. A. Wells: Recent Economic Changes, and their Effect on the Production and Distribution of Wealth and the Well-being of Society, 1896.
- E. Young: Labour in Europe and America, 1876.

SOCIAL DEVELOPEMENT:

Primary:

- Labour Department, Board of Trade: Report on Agencies and Methods for Dealing with the Unemployed, C7182, 1893.
- Labour Department, Board of Trade: Reports of Factory Inspectors.

Secondary:

- M. Bondfield: A Life's Work, 1948.
- J. Lawson: A Man's Life, 1944 ed.
- P. de Roussiers: The Labour Question in Britain, 1896.
- A. Shadwell: Industrial Efficiency (2 vols.), 1906.

THE SOCIALIST SOCIETIES:**Primary:**

The Commonweal.

The Fabian Society: Tracts.

Justice.

J. H. Watts: Scribblings (a scrap-book of clippings in the possession of Mr. H. L. Beales).

Secondary:

W. E. Adams: Memoirs of a Social Atom, II, 1903.

E. B. Bax: Reminiscences and Reflections of a Mid and Late Victorian, 1918.

A. Besant: Autobiography, 1893.

A. Besant: Why I am a Socialist, 1886.

E. Carpenter: My Days and Dreams, 1916.

A. Clutton-Brock: William Morris - his Work and Influence, 1919 ed.

M. Cole (ed.): The Webbs and their Work, 1949.

J. B. Glasier: William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement, 1921.

A. Henderson: Bernard Shaw, Playboy and Prophet, 1932.

S. G. Hobson: Pilgrim to the Left, 1938.

R. D. Howland: Fabian Thought and Social Change in England from 1884 to 1914 (unpublished thesis in the University of London, 1942).

H. M. Hyndman: Further Reminiscences, 1912.

H. M. Hyndman: Record of an Adventurous Life, 1911.

G. Lansbury: My Life, 1928.

H. W. Lee and E. Archbold: Social Democracy in Britain, 1935.

W. Morris and E. B. Bax: Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome, 1893.

- E. R. Pease: History of the Fabian Society, 1916.
 R. W. Postgate: George Lansbury, 1951.
 H. S. Salt: Seventy Years Amongst Savages, 1921.
 W. S. Sanders: Early Socialist Days, 1924.
 G. B. Shaw: The Fabian Society - What it has done and why it has done it (Fabian Tract 41), 1892.
 Social Democratic Federation: How I Became a Socialist, n.d.
 H. G. Wells: Experiment in Autobiography, 1934.

THE INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY:

Primary:

- The Clarion.
 Independent Labour Party Annual Conferences, Reports.
 Independent Labour Party: pamphlets.
 The Labour Leader.
 The Labour Elector.
 The Labour Prophet.
 Llais Ilafur.
 Scottish Workers' Parliamentary Elections Committee Annual Conferences, Reports.
 The Trade Unionist.
 The Worker's Cry.
 The Workman's Times.

Secondary:

- G. N. Barnes: From Workshop to War Cabinet, 1923.
 R. Blatchford: My Eighty Years, 1931.
 F. Brockway: Socialism over Sixty Years: Jowett of Bradford, 1944.
 S. Bryher: An Account of the Labour and Socialist Movement in Bristol, 1929.

- J. Burgess: John Burns - the Rise and Progress of a Right Honourable, 1911.
- J. Burgess: Will Lloyd George Supplant Ramsay MacDonald, 1926. (Despite its title, has valuable material on the origins of the IIF).
- G. D. H. Cole: John Burns, 1943.
- G. D. H. Cole: James Keir Hardie, 1942.
- H. Fyfe: Keir Hardie, 1935.
- A. P. Grubb: The Life Story of the Rt. Hon. John Burns, P.C., M.P., 1908.
- M. A. Hamilton: J. Ramsay MacDonald, 1929.
- E. Hughes: Keir Hardie, 1950.
- W. Kent: John Burns - Labour's Lost Leader, 1950.
- D. Lowe: From Pit to Parliament. The Story of the Early Life of James Keir Hardie, 1923.
- D. Lowe: Souvenirs of Scottish Labour, 1919.
- A. N. Lyons: Robert Blatchford, 1910.
- F. Maguire: A Remembrance, (1895).
- A. Reid, ed.: The New Party, 1894.
- W. Stewart: J. Keir Hardie, 1921.
- R. Smillie: My Life for Labour, 1924.
- A. Thompson: Here I Lie, 1937.
- L. Thompson: Robert Blatchford: Portrait of an Englishman, 1951.
- J. K. Tiltman: J. Ramsay MacDonald, Labour's Man of Destiny, 1929.
- B. Turner: About Myself, 1929.
- F. Verhaegen: Socialistes Anglaises, 1897.
- W. Whitely: J. Bruce Glasier... A Memorial, 1920.

THE "NEW" UNIONS:

Primary:

Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers' Union, Rules, Reports of Annual Congresses, Annual Reports, pamphlets.
 The Dockers' Record, (or The Monthly Record).
 Gasworkers' and General Labourers' Union, Annual Reports.
 National Amalgamated Union of Labour, Minutes of Executive Council.
 The People's Press.

Secondary:

- G. Brooks: Industry and Property, 1893.
 E. J. Hobsbawm: General Labour Unions in Britain, 1889-1914 (Economic History Review, 2nd Series, I, 1949).
 J. Hodge: Workman's Cottage to Windsor Castle, 1931.
 G. Howell: Trade Unionism, New and Old, 1891.
 Viscount Knutsford: In Black and White, 1926.
 T. Mann: Memoirs, 1923.
 T. Mann and B. Tillett: The "New" Trades Unionism, 1890.
 (Sir) J. Sexton: Sir James Sexton, Agitator: An Autobiography, 1936.
 H. L. Smith and V. Nash: The Story of the Dockers' Strike, 1890.
 H. G. Swift: A History of Postal Agitation, I, 1840-99, 1929 ed.
 National Union of General and Municipal Workers, Souvenir History, 1889-1929, 1929.
 W. Thorne: My Life's Battles, 1925.
 B. Tillett: Brief History of the Dockers' Union, 1910.
 B. Tillett: Memories and Reflections, 1931.

J. H. Wilson: My Stormy Voyage Through Life, 1925.
 Webb Trade Union Collection (British Library of Political
 Science), A IV, XLII, (manuscript notes).

OTHER TRADE UNIONS:

Primary:

Amalgamated Society of Engineers, Monthly, Quarterly, and
 Annual Reports, Journal and Monthly Record.
 Annual Reports on Trade Unions by Chief Labour Correspondent
 of the Board of Trade.
 Labour Electoral Association Annual Congresses, Reports of.
 Labour Representation Committee Annual Conferences, Reports of.
 Scottish Trades Union Congresses, Reports of Annual.
 Trades Union Congresses, Reports of Annual.
 United Textile Factory Workers' Association Conferences,
 Reports of.
 National Amalgamated Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives,
 Monthly Reports.

Secondary:

G. W. Alcock: Fifty Years of Railway Trade Unionism, 1922.
 Amalgamated Society of Engineers: Jubilee Souvenir, 1901.
 R. P. Arnot: The Miners, 1949.
 T. Burt: Autobiography, 1924.
 G. D. H. Cole and R. P. Arnot: Trade Unionism on the
 Railways, 1917.
 D. C. Cummings: A Historical Survey of the Boilermakers'
 and Iron and Steel Shipbuilders' Society, 1905.
 W. A. Dalley: The Life Story of W. J. Davis, 1914.
 W. J. Davis: The History of the Trades Union Congress, I,
 1910; II, 1916.

- N. Edwards: The History of the South Wales Miners, 1926.
 B. Fuller: The Life Story of the Rt. Hon. J. H. Thomas, 1933.
 M. A. Hamilton: Arthur Henderson, 1938.
 E. Howe: The London Compositor, 1785-1900, (documents), 1947.
 J. B. Jeffreys: The Story of the Engineers, 1946.
 R. Lavollée: Les Classes Ouvrières en Europe, III, 1896.
 P. Mantoux and M. Alfassa: La Crise du Trade Unionisme, 1903.
 W. Mosses: History of the United Pattern-Makers' Association, 1872-1922, 1922.
 National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives: Fifty Years, 1874-1924, 1924.
 H. R. S. Philpott: The Rt. Hon. J. H. Thomas, 1932.
 P. de Roussiers: Le Trade Unionisme en Angleterre, 1896.
 G. Tate (ed.): The London Trades Council, 1860-1950, 1950.
 J. H. Thomas: My Story, 1937.
 A. Watson: A Great Labour Leader (Thomas Burt), 1908.
 S. Webb: The Story of the Durham Miners, 1921.

MISCELLANEOUS:

Primary:

- Conference on the Remuneration of Capital and Labour, Report, 1885.
 Hansard, Parliamentary Debates.
 The Fortnightly Review.
 The Labour Annual (from 1901, The Reformers' Year Book).
 The New Review.
 The Nineteenth Century.
 Webb Trade Union Collection, A, I.

Secondary:

- J. Adderley: In Slums and Society, (1916).
- S. Atberry: Labour's Early Struggles in Swansea, 1947.
- M. Beer: Fifty Years of International Socialism, 1935.
- J. R. Clynes: Memoirs I, 1869-1924, 1937.
- W. Collison: The Apostle of Free Labour, 1913.
- W. Diack: The Trades Council and Trade Union Movement in Aberdeen, 1939.
- R. C. K. Ensor: Modern Socialism, 1907 ed.
- T. H. S. Escott: England, its People, Polity and Pursuits, 1891 ed.
- J. L. Garvin: The Life of Joseph Chamberlain, 1932-4.
- F. E. Hamer (ed.): Personal Papers of Lord Rendel, 1931.
- G. Haw: From Workhouse to Westminster -- the Life Story of Will Crooks, M.P., 1907.
- T. Johnston: The History of the Working Classes in Scotland, 1920.
- T. Mann: The Eight Hours Day, 1897.
- S. MacCoby: English Radicalism, 1853-86, 1938.
- F. Rogers: Labour, Life and Literature, 1913.
- F. H. Rose: The Coming Force, 1909.
- S. Salvidge: Salvidge of Liverpool, 1934.
- Lord Sanderson (H. S. Furniss): Memories of Eighty Years, 1931.
- Lord Snell: Men, Movements and Myself, 1936.
- P. (Viscount) Snowden: An Autobiography I, 1934.
- B. Webb: My Apprenticeship, 1926.
- B. Webb: Our Partnership, 1948.
- S. Webb and H. Cox: The Eight Hours Day, 1891.
- S. and B. Webb: Methods of Social Study, 1932.
- R. A. Woods: English Social Movements, 1891.