

EDWARDIAN ENGLAND

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- University Press, London, 1973), pp. 256-7, 279.
37. *Ibid.* pp. 257-62; E.H. Phelps Brown, *The Growth of British Industrial Relations* (Macmillan, London, 1959), pp. 124-8; P. Rowland, *The Last Liberal Government: Unfinished Business 1911-1914* (Barrie and Jenkins, London, 1971), pp. 146-54.
38. Lloyd George Papers, House of Lords Record Office, LGP C 21/1/17.
39. For the evolution of the Land Campaign see Lloyd George Papers C 2/1-4, C 11/1, C 15/1-2; also Emy, *Social Politics*, pp. 219-24, 229-33, 271-2; Rowland, *Unfinished Business*, pp. 171-3, 222-6, 323-5; Briggs, *Rowntree*, pp. 64-78; H.V. Emy, 'The Land Campaign: Lloyd George as a Social Reformer, 1909-1914' in A.J.P. Taylor (ed.), *Lloyd George, Twelve Essays* (Hamilton, London, 1971), pp. 35-68.
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41. Liberal Industrial Inquiry, *Britain's Industrial Future* (Benn, London, 1928), pp. 189-92; H.N. Brailsford, J.A. Hobson, A. Creech Jones and E.F. Wise, *The Living Wage* (Independent Labour Party, London, 1926), pp. 20-36.
42. D. Sells, *The British Trade Boards System*, (P.S. King, London, 1923), pp. 243-67; H.F. Hohman, *The Development of Social Insurance and Minimum Wage Legislation in Great Britain* (Houghton Mifflin, New York, 1933), pp. 380-412; F. Tillyard, *The Worker and the State*, 2nd edn. (Routledge, London, 1936), pp. 35-66; G. Williams, *The State and the Standard of Living* (P.S. King, London, 1936), pp. 115-30.
43. J. Macnicol, 'Family Allowances and Less Eligibility' in P. Thane (ed.) *The Origins of British Social Policy* (Croom Helm, London, 1978), pp. 173-202.

6 EDWARDIAN SOCIALISM

Kenneth O. Morgan

In the late autumn of 1906, a small coterie of committed intellectuals met in London to launch a new organisation and a new idea. A spectre was haunting Edwardian Britain — the spectre of the Historical Association!

But how much awareness did this new body show of that other spectre of which Marx had written so pungently, the spectre of socialism? In fact, the Historical Association does not seem to have shown much interest in the existence of British socialism until well after the First World War. The early meetings of the Association tended to deal with the remoter past: the journal *History*, founded in 1916, contained no discussions of the history of socialism for many years. Not until as late as 1970 can we discover an issue of the journal which contains a contribution uniquely devoted to an aspect of the evolution of twentieth-century European socialism.¹

Yet the impact and prospects of socialism gripped the minds of Edwardian contemporaries in the autumn of 1906 as they had done for twenty years past. Since the Eighties and early Nineties, avowedly socialist movements such as the Fabian Society and the Independent Labour Party had come into being. The *Fabian Essays* of 1889, to which the Webbs were major contributors, had familiarised the public with the arguments for a socialist programme and policy. Abroad, the influence of Bismarckian collectivism in Germany was a powerful stimulus. The Trades Union Congress increasingly showed the influence of socialists within its membership: motions in favour of the collective ownership of the means of production and distribution were passed at congresses from 1890 onwards. In 1892, Keir Hardie, a declared socialist who spoke the language of class revolt, had been elected to the House of Commons, allegedly wearing a miner's 'cloth cap'.² In 1900 he found a permanent parliamentary base at Merthyr Tydfil in South Wales. Socialists like Hardie and his fellow Scot, Ramsay MacDonald, were dominant figures in the founding of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900, that alliance of political activists and trade unions out of which the Labour Party was born.

The advance of socialism showed no sign of slackening at the time

when the Historical Association was founded. All the main socialist bodies in 1906 were demonstrating powerful evidence of advance. The branches of the Social Democratic Federation, a Marxist body, rose in number by over 100 between 1906 and 1908, and membership reached 12,000. The Fabian Society was founding new branches or cells outside London, in Manchester, Cardiff and elsewhere. The membership of the Independent Labour Party increased dramatically from 375 branches in March 1906 to nearly 900 three years later. Paid-up members of the party were said to total over 30,000. Socialist publications were also gaining new readership. The *Clarton*, edited by Robert Blatchford, reached a circulation of over 80,000 by the start of 1908,³ while *Clarton* cycling clubs carried Blatchford's unique gospel into distant regions. Pressure was under way for a socialist daily newspaper, that would result in the founding of the *Daily Herald* in 1911. Above all, there was the formation of the parliamentary Labour Party, under the chairmanship of Keir Hardie, after 29 Labour members were returned at the general election of January 1906. The Labour Party had no socialist programme, indeed no distinct programme of any kind other than working-class representation. An analysis of the earlier reading habits of the new Labour members in the *Review of Reviews* showed a reassuring bias in favour of the Bible, Shakespeare and Dickens, Ruskin and Carlyle, but no reference to Marx or other alien ideologues.⁴ Nevertheless, the new party was rightly regarded as the portent of a new advance by the working class, politically and industrially, which would bring socialism, so long thought of as an exotic fringe ideology, to the very forefront of British public life.

Edwardian socialism, therefore, is vital to the understanding of Edwardian England. Indeed, it can be understood properly only by taking a British standpoint, since Scotland and, more especially, Wales were crucial to the upsurge of socialism in the years up to 1914. The Historical Association in 1906 may have been preoccupied with the English past. The socialist movement of its day was mapping out a new English present and future.

Socialism was a concept often loosely used in Edwardian England. At times it was simply a term of abuse. It must now be carefully defined. In particular, it must be sharply differentiated from two other forces powerful at the time — the 'new Liberalism' and trade unionism.

The dynamic emergence of a new socially-conscious Liberalism was an outstanding feature of the Edwardian intellectual scene, with political and social theorists such as L.T. Hobhouse and J.A. Hobson, Leo Chiozza Money and C.F.G. Masterman gaining a wide and attentive

readership. Their ideas found many outlets in the newspaper and periodical press, notably in C.P. Scott's *Manchester Guardian* and A.G. Gardiner's *Daily News*. Soon, in 1907, a new weekly was to be founded, the *Nation* under the editorship of H.J. Massingham, enlisting such brilliant journalists as H.N. Brailsford, Hobson, Masterman and J.L. Hammond, specifically to propagate the gospel of the 'new Liberalism' and to embark upon what Churchill called the 'untrodden field of politics', the field of social reform.

From now on, the very essence of the Liberal ethic, as interpreted from Bentham down to the younger Mill, seemed to be transformed. There was a new emphasis upon collectivism, upon the positive and benevolent role of central and local government in combating social and economic evils such as poverty, slum housing, malnutrition and unemployment. Liberals increasingly viewed society in organic, collective form rather than in terms of an atomistic individualism. The evolutionary teaching of Darwin seemed far closer to their outlook than did the old imperatives of *laissez-faire*.⁵ In practical politics, the 'new Liberalism' found its instruments in the sweeping programme of social reform pushed through by Lloyd George, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Winston Churchill, the President of the Board of Trade, in the Liberal Government of Asquith from 1908 onwards. Old age pensions, labour exchanges, minimum wage legislation, trade boards in 'sweated industries', the 'People's Budget' of 1909 and above all Lloyd George's great National Health and Unemployment Insurance Act of 1911, carried the ideas of the 'new Liberalism' into permanent, legislative reality.

But the 'new Liberalism' simply was not socialism. The main theorists of the movement, from Hobhouse to Masterman, all drew a clear distinction between their philosophy and that of the socialists, even if they associated with Fabians like the Webbs and an ILP leader like MacDonald in the 'Rainbow Circle'. Hobhouse in *The Ethical Basis of Collectivism* (1897) showed a marked retreat from his earlier enthusiasm for Fabian-type collectivism and his optimism about the 'new unionism' so marked in *The Labour Movement* in 1893.⁶ Herbert Samuel in *Liberalism* (1902) argued specifically against the socialist notion of the nationalisation of industry. He said socialism had the same bogus appeal as alchemy or was like the beguiling vision of El Dorado.⁷ Even J.A. Hobson, in some ways the most radical of the 'new Liberals', in *The Crisis of Liberalism* in 1909 drew a line between liberalism, which elevated the freedom of the individual, and socialism, which exalted the power of the state.⁸ He was not to associate with the

Labour Party until the 1920s, and then only indirectly. Leo Chiozza Money also remained a Liberal until 1918. Another radical Liberal, Percy Alden, a leading Progressive on the London County Council, joined Labour at the same time – and was later to leave the party to return to the Liberal faith of his youth.

Amongst the politicians, Winston Churchill was always fierce in his denunciation of socialism, even in pre-Tonypanddy days. He drew an explicit distinction between socialism which sought to pull down wealth, and liberalism which aimed to raise up poverty. 'Socialism exalts the rule; Liberalism exalts the man.'⁹ To adapt his later phraseology, it was a contrast between the Liberal ladder and the Labour queue. Lloyd George during his campaign for the People's Budget in 1909-10 frequently attacked socialism saying that it would undermine capital and enterprise on which the nation's wealth depended. Earlier he had warned his fellow Liberals in Wales of the menace of the ILP,¹⁰ Social reform, rather than socialism, was the means for ensuring that British Liberalism did not follow continental Liberal parties along the path of stagnation and decline.

The idea of socialism ought also to be distinguished carefully from the growth of trade unionism. From the turn of the century, British trade unions had steadily expanded, particularly among skilled workers. Their progress was spurred on by the employers' apparent counter-offensive during the 1890s, in labour relations and in the courts, a phase that led to the Taft Vale case of 1900-01 in which Mr Justice Farwell's verdict against the railway workers (upheld in the Lords) appeared to undermine the basic right to strike without incurring financial penalty. The membership of trade unions rose inexorably from just over two million in 1901 to something over two and a half million in 1910. There was a further explosion of membership between 1911 and 1914 – perhaps the real beginning of 'new unionism' in permanent form – when seamen, dockers, general labourers and other unskilled men (and some women) became organised far more effectively. Trade union membership surged upwards from 2,500,000 in 1910 to 4,100,000 by the spring of 1914.

In addition to the sheer fact of numerical growth, this was a time of far greater determination and militancy amongst trade unionists as well. In the much-discussed 'labour unrest' of the 1910-14 period, there were lengthy strikes among miners, railwaymen and transport workers. The national scale of these strikes was as remarkable as was the violence that sometimes accompanied them. There was even loss of life in South Wales, in the Cambrian miners' strike at Tonypanddy in November 1910

and during the railway strike in Llanelli in August 1911. In early 1914 the Miners Federation, the Railwaymen and the Transport Workers started to form the Triple Alliance for collaborative action.¹¹ There was widespread apprehension of a general strike that could paralyse the economy and bring down the constitutionally-elected government. The new aggressiveness was especially marked among the miners, where the South Wales men, numerically the largest part of the workforce in the British coal industry, were becoming increasingly influential. The South Wales miners were in the forefront of the miners' affiliation to the Labour Party in 1909, in the struggle for an eight hours' bill in 1909, in the turmoil that engulfed the mining industry in 1910-11, and in the fight for the national minimum wage in 1912. Stimulated by pressures such as these, by 1914 every major group of industrial workers, skilled and unskilled, was committed to supporting the Labour Party and was increasingly assertive industrially as well.

Now in one important area, to be examined later, trade unionism had a direct impact upon the growth of British socialism. But in general the trade union movement, like the philosophy of the 'new Liberalism', ought to be distinguished clearly from the advance of socialism. The objectives of the trade unions, concerned with winning specific economic gains for limited groups of workers, and of the socialists, dedicated to recasting the entire political and socio-economic system, were quite distinct. Many contemporaries believed that they were opposed: Liberals like Lloyd George chose to draw the contrast between 'sensible' traditional union leaders like Thomas Burt, Fenwick, or Mabon', and the wild and dangerous doctrines of the socialists of the newer generation. Within the socialist world, ILP leaders like Hardie and Bruce Glasier were alarmed at the affiliation of the miners to the Labour Party in 1909, since they contained so many, especially in the Midlands and Durham coalfields, who were Lib-Lab moderates rather than socialists. The annual conferences of the Labour Party would now be controlled by coal and cotton, where traditions of class harmony and industrial conciliation were widely established. 'There are times,' wrote Hardie, 'when I confess to feeling sore at seeing the fruits of our years being garnered by men who were never of us, and who even now would trick us out gin they daur.'¹²

The trade unions, in short, for all their new-found militancy, were basically committed to what Lenin called 'economism', or what the British termed 'pure and simple Labourism'. They gloried in the undogmatic ideological *laissez-faire* which characterised the TUC within the Labour Party, Hardie's 'labour alliance'. They were sectional,

unpolitical, almost unideological in their outlook. They viewed a collectivist, let alone a corporatist, approach towards industrial relations with alarm and dismay. Their major effort in public affairs lay in protecting their own rights and legal status. They campaigned hard against the Taff Vale verdict and gained the triumph of the 1906 Trades Disputes Act which guaranteed them immunity from financial penalties in industrial disputes. They battled with equal success against the 1908 Osborne Judgement which imperilled the political levy to the Labour Party: the 1913 Trade Union Act restored the levy, on a 'contracting-out' basis. Otherwise the worlds of the TUC and of the Labour Party were quite distinct. On economic policy, social reform, unemployment, the TUC had little to say. One view of the difference was spelt out by J. R. Clynes at the 1909 Labour Party conference when he stated that trade unions asked for a share of the wealth they created, while the socialists (of whom he was one, albeit a moderate) told the workers to claim the full product of their labour.¹³

British trade unionists did not advance significantly beyond this attitude until the growth of collectivism and corporatism brought about during the First World War led to a new alignment between trade unionism and British socialism, with the 1918 Labour Party constitution as part of its legacy.

The major forms of socialism, precisely defined, in 1906 were much as they had been for the past dozen years — the predominantly Marxist Social Democratic Federation; the Fabian Society; and the Independent Labour Party. Their formal programmes were reprinted in the 1907 edition of R. C. K. Ensor's *Modern Socialism*. Of these three, it was clearly the ILP which exercised most influence and political impact at this time. The other two were somewhat in the shadows for much of the pre-1914 years.

The SDF remained in some disorder throughout the period. It had disaffiliated from the Labour Representation Committee in 1901 and had been a fringe movement ever since. Its candidates at the 1906 election had all been heavily defeated save for Will Thorne of the Gas workers at West Ham South who remained a candidate sponsored by the LRC. Despite renewed evidence of growth of membership at the grass-roots, and continuing strength being shown in local trades councils notably in East London, these were difficult years for the Social Democrats. They were given a boost in August 1907 with the dramatic return of the youthful Victor Grayson in a by-election at Colne Valley in the West Riding of Yorkshire, in defiance of the ban imposed by the executive of the Labour Party.¹⁴ But in fact Grayson, an erratic and

unstable personality for all his many gifts, merely accentuated the divisions within the Marxist world, especially with regard to national defence and foreign relations. Grayson, who in any case was not a member of the SDF, tended to voice an aggressive anti-German jingoism like his ally Robert Blatchford of the *Clarion*. In the general election of January 1910, only seven SDF candidates were put up, and all did badly. Grayson finished bottom of the poll in a three-cornered contest at Colne Valley. Further divisions and disputes led to the foundation of the British Socialist Party in 1912, a movement which represented in part a revolt against the traditional leadership of H. M. Hyndman. Other SDF militants joined the fringe Socialist Labour Party, a body much influenced by the industrial unionism preached by Daniel de Leon in the United States.

By 1914, the Social Democrats were in extreme disarray. Older leaders such as Hyndman and Harry Quelch, still preaching the pure milk of Marxist doctrine, surplus value, the law of capital accumulation, the theory of growing immiseration and all the rest, were now beleaguered, dated figures. They merely confirmed that the influence of Marxism upon the early history of the British socialist movement remained negligible.

The intellectuals of the Fabian Society were also going through an unhappy time in the Edwardian years. For some years they had tended to act as a kind of cross-party pressure-group to promote collectivist ideas, rather than as an arm of a political socialist movement. They had close links with Liberals such as Haldane and even with Conservatives such as Balfour and the protectionists, W. A. S. Hewins and Halford Mackinder, who served as the first two directors of the new London School of Economics from 1895. They were never really reconciled to the main stream of the 'new Liberalism', still less to the unpredictable, intuitive social politics erratically propounded by David Lloyd George. From 1905 the main intellectual energies of the Webbs in particular were directed towards the Royal Commission on the Poor Law. Sidney and Beatrice Webb's ideas permeated the celebrated but unfulfilled Minority Report of that body, published in 1909.

Much of the old optimism, even complacency, of the Fabians had evaporated by 1906. The society, indeed, was experiencing a new turmoil and tension. Some of it was promoted by that youthful new Machiavellian, the self-proclaimed scientific socialist, H. G. Wells, who generated an intense and passionate argument in the Society about its general outlook and its style of earnest permeation and education.¹⁵ Wells, backed up by Sidney Olivier amongst the older Fabians though

certainly not by Bernard Shaw, proved a disruptive element from the outset. His ideas on open marriage and free love scandalised the puritanical Webbs. Eventually he resigned from the Fabians for good in 1909, leaving behind him a legacy of unconcomradely dissension.

Others left the Fabians for alternative havens. A. R. Orage and S. G. Hobson founded the *New Age*, a literary journal but also a vehicle for their peculiar metaphysical, Nietzschean vision, with theosophist overtones. It implied essentially a revolt against politics and the style of bureaucratic collectivism that Shaw and the Webbs had always favoured. The retreat from public affairs was even more evident in G. D. H. Cole's guild socialist movement, and in the esoteric artistic communities launched by ex-Fabians such as Eric Gill, Edwin Muir and Herbert Read.¹⁶ These, too, confirmed the erosion of the society.

Most of all, the Fabians were unhappy at the evolution of the Labour Party, a body which they had helped form in 1900 but which they could never claim to control or (before 1914) decisively to influence. They disliked the party's lack of intellectual rigour. They displayed snobbish middle-class prejudice at the dominance within the party of unlettered trade unionists, whose grammar was as suspect as their political rigour. Worst of all was the emotional, sentimental, ethical socialism preached by Keir Hardie for whom Beatrice Webb had a massive contempt.¹⁷

After some years in a kind of political no-mans-land, in the autumn of 1912 the Webbs again reluctantly associated themselves with the Labour Party. They swallowed their pride and even joined the ILP. But down to the advent of war in August 1914 they remained relatively peripheral figures in the history of British socialism, unable to relate their theories on social engineering and centralised economic planning to the political and industrial structures of the labour movement of the time. 'We have not yet worked out Socialism', Beatrice Webb sadly confessed to Shaw in June 1914.¹⁸ As for many other reformers, it was the years of total war between 1914 and 1918 that gave the Webbs a new relevance and a central role once again in the odyssey of British socialism.

By far the most influential of all the varieties of Edwardian socialism in 1906 and later was the Independent Labour Party. Its twenty-first anniversary was marked by much joyful celebration at Bradford in April 1914, the pleasure of the occasion undisturbed by heckling from suffragettes in the audience. Keir Hardie graced the conference with a speech of extraordinary emotional intensity, one of the high points of his self-proclaimed career as 'agitator' and seer.¹⁹

Yet this had been a difficult time for the ILP, too. There had been continuous bickering at the grass-roots level, mainly from young activists who resented the affiliation to an unorthodox and essentially opportunistic Labour Party. The rebellion came out into the open at the Edinburgh conference in April 1909 when Hardie, MacDonald, Snowden and Glasier, the quartet who had dominated the party for over a decade, jointly resigned in protest from the party's executive (the National Administrative Council) after a hostile motion, introduced by Victor Grayson, had been narrowly carried against the executive's advice.²⁰ In 1910, some militants produced the 'green manifesto', *Let Us Reform the Labour Party*, which attacked the very idea of affiliation to the Labour Party and called for a common platform with the SDF and the Socialist Labour Party. 'Better it would be for socialism one hundred times to face certain defeat, fighting for our principles, than expose our movement to the certainty of betrayal by our political enemies.'²¹ There was also criticism that the ILP, founded as a workers' movement, was becoming increasingly middle-class in its composition and its leadership. Certainly, the mass membership of the party was not increasing in industrial areas. Local branches declined in number from 887 in 1909 to only 672 in 1914, after a generation of effort.

For all that, the ILP was easily the most important socialist movement of the day. It influenced public life and public dialogue at an immense variety of levels. It produced most of the leading socialist newspapers, from national weeklies like the *Labour Leader* to purely local publications like the *Leicester Pioneer* and the *Merthyr Pioneer*. Indeed, journalism was a vital facet of the ILP, through which its ethic and private culture were developed and broadcast.²² The ILP newspapers lacked the distinctive appeal of Blatchford's incomparable *Clarton*, but as sources of information, organisation and nation-wide communication they were probably more influential in the long term. The ILP also produced many of the leading socialist ideologues. Among these, Ramsay MacDonald clearly stood out. Later to be derided as a woolly utopian cliché-monger, he was in the Edwardian period admired as the leading intellectual asset of the British socialist movement.²³ His evolutionary, quasi-Darwinian vision of socialism, replete with biological metaphors and references to organic growth, won many converts. His theoretical writings in the socialist press and such works as *Socialism and Society* (1905), *Socialism and Government* (1909) and *The Socialist Movement* (1911) were highly characteristic of their period, with their emphasis on peaceful evolution towards the socialist

commonwealth and their rejection of the Marxist message of class war. The ILP also provided the major contemporary examples of socialism in practice. Indeed, from its earliest years in the 1890s, it had always taken local government very seriously, both in terms of capturing power at the borough or municipal level, and perhaps in terms of local devolution for Wales and Scotland as well (causes dear to Keir Hardie's heart as a Scotsman who represented a Welsh constituency). From Merthyr Tydfil to Bradford, even in London in places like Woolwich and Poplar, there were socialist majorities in control of local institutions and services. A new generation of local leadership was being built up in mining and other areas. Alternatively, ILP local councillors collaborated with progressively-minded Liberals as on the London County Council (until 1907) putting 'municipal socialism', including municipal trading schemes and the local ownership of tramways, gas, water and other utilities, into effect. Long before 1914, there were many local examples of socialism as a practical reality rather than simply a utopian creed.

Finally, the ILP produced (with the exception of Arthur Henderson of the Ironfounders, who became secretary of the Labour Party in 1911) all the major national figures of the Labour movement. Their influence upon the nascent Labour Party between 1906 and 1914 was immense. Keir Hardie remained a powerful inspiration and a unique popular crusader long after he gave up the chairmanship of the parliamentary Labour Party in 1908. Somewhat a waning force in the years before 1914, he retained a unique charisma, as a symbol of incorruptible independence. On such issues as Labour's attitude towards the industrial unrest of 1910-14 he could still exercise a powerful influence. His many pamphlets and journalistic exercises, such as his famous tract explaining the rationale behind the Labour alliance in 1909,²⁴ enjoyed massive circulation. His *From Serfdom to Socialism* (1907) was a statement of basic socialist principles. Still only 58 in August 1914, Hardie was firmly enthroned as 'Labour's grand old man'. The mere exposure of a youthful journalist like Fenner Brockway to Hardie's personality in 1906 could make him a socialist on the spot.²⁵ Countless others would have confirmed this experience. Philip Snowden, another dominant ILP figure, was also a popular socialist evangelist, initially in his native West Riding, but soon all over the British Isles. No-one proclaimed more earnestly the apocalyptic vision of 'the Christ that was to be'. But Snowden, returned to the House as member for Blackburn in 1906, became far more than an orator or propagandist. He became the Labour Party's leading — indeed, its only

— expert on the arcane subject of public finance. His exposition of the essentials of a 'socialist's budget' in 1907 became the basis for Labour's views on direct and indirect taxation, close as they were to the ideas of the 'new Liberals', land taxes and all.²⁶ From 1906 down to the débâcle of 1931, Philip Snowden was the stem, Cobdenite embodiment of a socialist fiscal policy.

Above all, there was Ramsay MacDonald whose reputation as political activist as well as theorist rose steadily throughout the period. He became easily the most effective Labour parliamentarian in the House, as well as a handsome and compelling mass orator. The tragic death of his beloved wife in July 1911 merely increased his determination to build up his movement and his party. That same year, he succeeded George Barnes as chairman of the parliamentary Labour Party, and he was to prove easily the most effective early holder of that somewhat thankless post; he was perhaps, some surmised, even on prime ministerial quality. There were those who attacked MacDonald for his excessive intimacy with the Liberals during this period of the 'progressive alliance'. Indeed on 3 March 1914 he was secretly approached by Lloyd George about the possibility of his joining the government and turning the 'alliance' into a frank, open coalition.²⁷ But MacDonald was always clear in his mind that Labour's independence must be preserved at all costs, and that, indeed, the ultimate, long-term task was to supplant the Liberals as the leading spokesmen of the British left. During some difficult bye-elections in Midlands mining constituencies in 1913-14 when Liberal and Labour candidates were in opposition, MacDonald championed the essence of that independent, distinct role for Labour, that he and the ILP so clearly embodied.

Spurred on by figures like Hardie, Snowden and MacDonald — to whom ought to be added Bruce Glasier, an idealistic Scot dominant in the ILP who never managed to enter parliament — the ILP was the essential vehicle for winning converts to socialism throughout the period from 1906 to 1914. Of course, members were gained in industrial areas such as South Wales, because of the excitement of the 1904 religious revival as well as the new convulsions in industrial relations in the mining industry. Young miners like James Griffiths in Ammanford, Aneurin Bevan in Tredegar, Arthur Horner in Merthyr, Ness Edwards in Caerphilly all joined the ILP at this time. In London's Brixton, Herbert Morrison, a young shop assistant, left the SDF for the ILP in 1910.²⁸

But, perhaps even more important in the long term, the ILP

continued to attract young middle-class intellectuals and idealists throughout the period. Between 1900 and 1914, a powerful array of youthful reformers joined the party, even if, as has been seen, those attached to the 'new Liberalism' measured their distance from the Labour Party or from socialism more generally. Journalists like R. C. K. Ensor or H. N. Brailsford; university-trained social workers like Clement Attlee and Hugh Dalton; a youthful ex-missionary like Fenner Brockway all joined the ILP. During the First World War, many more advanced Liberals were to join them in revulsion against the holocaust in Europe. The personal and intellectual impact of all this for the future of British politics was immense. When, in 1945, the Labour Party gained power, for the first time with a huge landslide majority, most of its leading personalities in the Cabinet — Attlee and Dalton, Morrison and Shinwell, Bevan and Griffiths, Isaacs and Creech-Jones — had formulated their vision of socialism in terms of, and through the medium of, the ILP. The fact that by 1945 the ILP had become a small sectarian fringe group, largely identified with those areas of Glasgow where Jimmy Maxton's writ still ran, obscures the immense wider impact that the party had exercised on the British labour movement in its decisive, formative years.

The ILP's version of socialism was stamped indelibly on British political history henceforth. The fact that the party's ideas were so often considered to be utopian and sentimental, and were so often derided by middle-class intellectuals such as Cole or the Webbs, must not blind us to the important contribution the ILP made to socialist theory and ideas. There was the characteristic emphasis on ethical, fraternal forms of socialism. It implied, so Hardie and Snowden declared, a crusade, not a class conflict. Socialism, wrote Hardie, made war upon a system, not upon a class.²⁹ The background reading of the new Labour members in 1906, illuminated by the *Review of Reviews* as noted above, testified to the appeal of this brand of ethical socialism, so close to the Nonconformist roots of the ILP in areas like the West Riding, Lancashire and South Wales, for the political Labour movement as a whole. There was also the flexible strategy of a 'labour alliance' with the trade unions. The ILP insisted that any viable socialist movement must be directly associated with the mass of organised workers rather than turn into an esoteric sect on the pattern of the Marxist SDF.

Again, the ILP was adaptable in its programmes as well as its allies. Rather than stand aloof from the political and governmental system of the day, the outlook maintained by the German Social Democrats from

1875 to 1914, the ILP insisted that minimal piecemeal social reforms could and should be endorsed as steps on the road towards socialism. Thus legislation for a minimum wage for miners, far from blunting the appeal of socialism, would help impress on the wider public the need for a new, humane wages policy for all workers in all industries. There was always, too, a powerful emphasis by the ILP on the democratic process at the national and municipal level, on gaining socialism by consent, by a revolution through the ballot box. The ILP, Hardie and MacDonald among them, always insisted on local accountability, on bringing power closer to the people, rather than instituting a huge bureaucratic statist juggernaut as favoured by the Marxists of the German Social Democratic Party.

Lastly, there was British socialism viewed as part of a worldwide movement. In the years since 1945, when the Labour Party's stance on international affairs has so often seemed insular and when the Socialist International has had little impact on British domestic politics, it is salutary to recall how the British Labour movement was once seen as an integral part of the Second International and the wider crusade against war. Men like Hardie and MacDonald travelled widely and became honoured figures in the international peace movement, the close comrades of European and American socialists like Jaures, Bebel, Adler and Debs. Like Wordsworth and Burns in 1789, a socialist in the ILP in 1914 could genuinely feel himself to be a citizen of the world, where universal brotherhood was a living reality.

It was sometimes felt by local activists that the flexibility of tactics and doctrine advocated by the ILP could lead to a blurring of the focus upon the essential socialist message. Indeed, the tendency of the ILP leaders and of the Labour Party in Parliament to associate with radical Liberals on a variety of wider issues, removed from the basic themes of class and economic power involved in the socialist dialectic, was sometimes felt to go too far until the ILP was almost turning into an all-purpose left-wing pressure-group rather than the spearhead of socialism.

On several issues that arose in politics between 1906 and 1914, the ILP, or some of its leaders, made common cause with radical 'progressives'. One was the question of votes for women, which deeply engaged the energies of Keir Hardie and Philip Snowden in particular. Indeed, Hardie's close personal attachment to Sylvia Pankhurst and to her mother gave him a powerful emotional stimulus in involving himself in the women's movement.³⁰ One leading socialist MP, George Lansbury, resigned his seat at Bow and Bromley in protest at the Liberal Govern-

ment's stern treatment of the suffragettes – a seat which he promptly lost for Labour at the succeeding by-election. There were those who complained that issues of sex dominated the activities of the ILP rather more than issues of class in these years. Again, there was the cause of colonial freedom. In pressing for self-government to be accorded to India and possibly to Egypt, Hardie and other ILP leaders worked closely with anti-colonialist radicals. In this period was to be built up that intimate relationship between the Indian Congress movement and the British Labour Party that led, after many shifts and turns, to India's being granted independence by the Attlee Government in 1947. Another dependent nation, Ireland, again saw the ILP, with its liberationist outlook, working closely with the Liberals. The Irish Home Rule Bills of 1912–14 all saw the Labour Party, socialists and trade unionists alike, line up loyally behind the Liberal Government. Finally, there was the peace movement, which saw men like Hardie, MacDonald, Snowden and Fred Jowett much involved with the Liberal backbenchers' Foreign Affairs committee in crusading against the build-up of armaments and the dividing of Europe into two hostile armed camps. Hardie advocated, with the French socialist, Vaizantz, an international general strike against war.

All these themes broadened the campaigns of the ILP and its particular role within the Labour Party. But they did not extinguish the basic socialist message that the ILP represented. MacDonald and the other leaders urged that the independent and distinctively socialist position of the ILP should remain untarnished. Indeed, such themes as the liberation of women (including their social emancipation within trade unions), peace, and colonial freedom were inextricably linked with the socialist diagnosis of the inequalities within and without British society. It was part of the genius of the early Labour Party that it was able both to preserve its independence and yet to harmonise with a wider British radical tradition. It emerged as a relevant, living part of British political culture in a way that the exclusive sectarianism of the SDF could never achieve. It was a tribute to the dominant influence of the ILP within the socialist movement that this delicate balance was so triumphantly achieved.

The trade unions, as has been seen, were generally separable from the socialist movement. But there is one important exception in the rise of a form of industrial socialism, comparable to French syndicalism, in several unions between 1909 and 1914. There were many distinct elements in this powerful new phenomenon. There was the campaign for industrial unionism launched by de Leon in the United States, and

propagated by Tom Mann, returned home from Australia in 1910. At a much more rarefied level, there was G.D.H. Cole's exposition of guild socialism as an alternative to nationalisation. There was also the revolt on behalf of a specifically working-class style of education and culture that was launched by the strike of students at Ruskin College, Oxford, in 1909; which, after much bitterness and some violence, led to the formation of the rival Central Labour College, devoted to teaching Marxist economics and sociology.³¹ Across the water, there was the Irish example of 'Larkinism', that pressure for direct industrial action advocated by Jim Larkin during the lengthy strike of Dublin transportation workers in 1913.

In varying ways, these different forces soon coloured the ideas of several major British trade unions. In particular, it stimulated rank-and-file movements for direct industrial action of which the most celebrated example arose amongst the South Wales miners between 1910 and 1912. The Plebs League was launched in the Rhondda, and the Unofficial Reform Committee of miners challenged the quietist, orthodox trade-union philosophy of the executive of the Miners' Federation. Prominent in the URC were young militants like Noah Ablett and Frank Hodges, both active in the Ruskin College 'strike'. Through younger disciples like Arthur Cook and newspapers like the *Rhondda Bomb*, they spread a new syndicalist doctrine throughout the coalfield, winning supporters in other regions as well.

Common to all these rank-and-file movements was pressure for industrial rather than political socialism, for workers' control at the local level instead of nationalisation by a remote state bureaucracy, for industrial democracy rather than administrative elitism. A significant debate took place amongst the Welsh miners in 1912 between Vernon Hartshorn and George Barker, advocating the standard Labour argument for nationalisation of the mines, and Ablett and Hodges, arguing for syndicalism.³² In the popular phrase, it was a choice between 'Mines for the Nation' and 'Mines for the Miners'.

The most celebrated document embodying these new doctrines was the *Miners' Next Step*, published by the Unofficial Reform Committee at Tonypanddy, home of the recent riots, in 1912. It emphasised grassroots democratic control at the pithead or lodge level; local workers' elected councils rather than a distant union apparatus; an overt attack on the capitalist system by direct industrial sabotage rather than gradualist consensual politics through the Miners' Federation, let alone the Labour Party. To Ablett and the other authors of the *Miners' Next Step*, the executive officers of the Miners' Federation and their

long-entrenched district agents had almost become a part of the capitalist system themselves, in their commitment to gradualism, and their resistance to the weapon of the political strike.

Before 1914, the impact of all this was relatively slight. Indeed, the trades most galvanised by change at this time were the skilled unions of the engineers, where a nascent type of shop stewards movement was emerging, and the building workers engaged in a lock-out in 1914. Elsewhere, the doctrines represented by the *Miners' Next Step* were being widely repudiated, as merely an updated form of anarchism. By the summer of 1914, the pamphlet itself was half-forgotten; militant organisations like the Plebs League, and similar movements in railway workshops, were near to dissolution.³³ Philip Snowden argued the majority view powerfully and effectively in *Socialism and Syndicalism*: he stressed the constitutional, political method of obtaining social change. He urged the need for socialism to have a nationwide appeal, transcending class barriers. Like the Welshman, Vernon Hartshorn, he declared it was 'utterly impractical and undesirable' to build a planned, efficient industrial system on the sectional, individualist basis of workers' control.³⁴ In the columns of the *Labour Leader*, Snowden came close to ruling out the strike weapon under any circumstances – for which he was faithfully taken to task by Keir Hardie, himself another staunch opponent of syndicalism.³⁵ At the Miners Federation of Great Britain conference in 1912, Bob Smillie of the Scottish Miners denounced syndicalism as 'individualism run mad'. In ballots held in 1913, union after union voted by large majorities to confirm their political levy to the Labour Party. In the Edwardian period, therefore, political socialism, mainly of the type represented by the ILP, remained overwhelmingly in the ascendant. Industrial socialism, as urged by the 'unofficial' movements of 1912, seemed largely an exotic irrelevance.

But the argument was far from over in 1914. Indeed, the appeal of syndicalism or other forms of workers' control, and the general impetus in favour of industrial socialism, remained an important part of British history. During the war, there were renewed shop stewards' movements amongst the engineers and shipyard workers, given new force by the impact of the Munitions of War Acts with their threat to the status of the skilled craftsman. In the early 1920s, tension between the political and industrial aspirations of the labour movement was constantly apparent, finally erupting in the convulsion of the 1926 general strike. This showed itself again in industrial protest against the National Government during the years of unemployment in the thirties;

in rank-and-file 'unofficial' movements within the unions against the Cripps wage freeze policy of 1948-50 that helped to generate the phenomenon of 'Bevanism',³⁶ in pressure for a more aggressive wages policy at the plant rather than the national level in the 1960s; and in union movements aligned behind Tony Benn on behalf of more emphatically left-wing socialist policies in the late 1970s and the start of the Eighties. It is ironical indeed that Mr Benn is himself the son of an eminent Edwardian 'new Liberal' – as, incidentally, is Michael Foot!

It is easy to exaggerate the impact of socialists of all shades upon the political and intellectual history of Britain in the Edwardian period and later. One impressionistic estimate in 1907 was that there were no more than 50,000 British electors who considered themselves socialists.³⁷ Nevertheless, it would not be totally implausible to interpret a good deal of British domestic history since 1906 in terms of a conflict between two rival versions of socialism, both of which emerged in full stature during the Edwardian years. On the one hand, was the constitutional parliamentary form espoused by the ILP, translated into the Labour Party down to 1945, and subsequently permeating all major parties in the legacy of Keynesian-style 'Butskellism' emerging from the Atlee-based consensus that dominated British politics from 1945 to 1979 and may well re-emerge. The unauthorised, alternative version was the industrial vision of workers' power, based on a radically divergent analysis of the class system and its relation to the political and economic structure. The debate still goes on: the struggle between Mr Healey and Mr Benn for the deputy leadership of the Labour Party is only the most spectacular recent example of it. In that sense, we are all – or many of us – Edwardians now. Whatever the outcome, it can at least be concluded that the Historical Association, at the time of its seventy-fifth anniversary, may be a shade less cloistered and less detached from contemporary socio-political controversy than were Professor Pollard and his fellow founder-members back in 1906.

Notes

1. Douglas Johnson, 'Leon Blum and the Popular Front', *History*, Vol. 55, No. 184 (June 1970), pp. 199-206.
2. For this, see Kenneth O. Morgan, *Keir Hardie: Radical and Socialist* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1975), pp. 54-55.
3. *Clarion*, 15 May 1908.
4. 'The Labour Party and the Books that helped to make it', *Review of*

- Reviews, Vol. 33 (1906), pp. 568-82.
5. This is admirably discussed in Michael Freedon, *The New Liberalism: an Ideology of Social Reform* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1978), *passim*.
 6. Stefan Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology* (University Press, Cambridge, 1979), pp. 59-74.
 7. Herbert Samuel, *Liberalism: its Principles and Proposals* (Grant Richards, London, 1902), pp. 149-52.
 8. J.A. Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism: New Issues of Democracy* (P.S. King, London, 1909), p. 93.
 9. Winston Churchill, *Liberalism and the Social Problem* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1909), p. 155, quoting his speech at Dundee, 14 May 1908.
 10. Lloyd George's speech to Welsh National Liberal Council, Cardiff, 11 October 1906, *South Wales Daily News*, 12 October 1906.
 11. G.A. Phillips, 'The Triple Industrial Alliance in 1914', *Economic History Review* Series II, XXIV (1971), 55-67.
 12. Hardie to Glasier, 27 December 1908 (Bruce Glasier Papers).
 13. *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party* (Manchester, 1909), p. 57.
 14. David Clark, *Cohne Valley: Radicalism to Socialism* (Longman, London, 1981), pp. 141-61.
 15. Norman and Jeane Mackenzie, *The First Fabians* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1977), pp. 322-42.
 16. Stanley Pierson, *The British Socialists: the Journey from Fantasy to Politics* (Harvard University Press, London, 1979), pp. 226-49.
 17. Barbara Drake and Margaret Cole (eds.), *Beatrice Webb: our Partnership* (Longman, London, 1948), p. 127.
 18. Beatrice Webb to Bernard Shaw, 13 June 1914, cited in Norman Mackenzie (ed.), *The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb*, Volume III (Cambridge University Press and London School of Economics, Cambridge, 1978), pp. 31-32.
 19. *Report of the Annual Conference of the Independent Labour Party*, Bradford, 1914; Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left* (Allen and Unwin, London, 1942), p. 39.
 20. *Report of the Annual Conference of the Independent Labour Party* (Edinburgh, 1909); Bruce Glasier's diary, 13 April 1909.
 21. Quoted in Walter Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, 1900-21* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1969), p. 37.
 22. On this, see Deian Hopkin, 'The Newspapers of the Independent Labour Party' (University of Wales PhD thesis, 1981).
 23. *Report of the Annual Conference of the Independent Labour Party*, Birmingham, 1911, pp. 82-4.
 24. Keir Hardie, *My Confession of Faith in the Labour Alliance* (Independent Labour Party, London, 1909).
 25. Brockway, *Inside the Left*, pp. 16-17; also interview with Lord Brockway, 19 March 1974.
 26. Philip Snowden, *The Socialist's Budget* (new edition, Harvester Press, Brighton, 1974).
 27. Memorandum in MacDonald Papers, 8/1 (Public Record Office).
 28. Bernard Donoghue and G.W. Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1973), p. 19.
 29. *Labour Leader*, 2 September 1904.
 30. Material in Sylvia Pankhurst Papers, 1C (Institute of Social History, Amsterdam).
 31. See W.W. Craik, *The Central Labour College* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1964).
 32. Kenneth O. Morgan, 'Socialism and Syndicalism: the Welsh Miners' debate, 1912', *Society for the Study of Labour History, Bulletin* No. 30 (Spring 1975), pp. 22-36, printing material from the W.H. Mainwaring Papers.
 33. See M.G. Woodhouse, 'Rank and File Movements among the Miners of South Wales, 1910-1926' (Oxford University D.Phil. thesis, 1970).
 34. Philip Snowden, *Socialism and Syndicalism* (Collins, London, 1913), pp. 233-47; for Hartshorn's views, see *South Wales Daily News*, 13 September 1912.
 35. *Labour Leader*, 2-23 October 1913.
 36. Mark Jenkins, *Benjamin: Labour's High Tide* (Spokesman Books, Nottingham, 1980), pp. 113-45.
 37. Donald Read, *Edwardian England* (Harrap, London, 1972), p. 90, citing *The Times*, 21 October 1907.