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## THE “IMPOSSIBILIST REVOLT” IN BRITAIN

THE ORIGINS OF THE S.L.P. AND THE S.P.G.B.

The Socialist Labour Party and the Socialist Party of Great Britain came into existence as the result of the “impossibilist revolt” of 1900-1904. The “revolt” was a movement of a few hundred socialists within the Social Democratic Federation, itself a social revolutionary party with a membership of only a few thousands. The absence of widespread support for any of these revolutionary movements in a country whose political tradition has remained predominantly constitutional accounts for the fact that the crisis inside the S.D.F., and with it the origins of the S.L.P. and the S.P.G.B. themselves have been consigned to obscurity in the history of British Socialism.

However, the revolt was an indication of the general crisis of socialism in the early 20th century, the period of imperialism. Internationally, the struggle revealed itself in the controversies over the Socialist attitude to war. Inside each country, the question at issue was whether the Socialist Commonwealth could be achieved by constitutional reform or violent revolution. Despite its twenty years history, the S.D.F. had failed to give a definite answer to these questions. Young Marxists, especially in Scotland and London, revolted against the “opportunistic” tendencies of the “official” S.D.F. They were derided as “impossibilists”, and their movement was proscribed by the official leaders. Yet the formation of the S.L.P. and the S.P.G.B. does not appear to have overcome the Socialist crisis. In spite of, or rather because of, their failure to tackle successfully the causes of their own revolt, the new groups survived, one to provide an important contingent for the Communist Party, and the other to remain in existence as an independent socialist party. In the following article an attempt is made to trace the “impossibilist revolt” as a manifestation of the S.D.F. crisis at the beginning of the present century.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In preparing this article I owe much to Mr. Henry Pelling of Queen’s College, Oxford, who gave me, among other things, valuable references, in particular, to the (American) S. L. P. Papers, the New York People, and the Challenge.

## I

The S.D.F. was the pioneer organisation of the "Socialist Revival" in the early 'eighties and in the later years of that decade it attracted wide attention as a potentially revolutionary force at a time when unemployment was widespread and rioting took place in London. Owing, however, to its dogmatic interpretation and strait-jacket application of Marxism the S.D.F. failed to secure any considerable permanent membership. Meanwhile, the spread of socialism among the working class (through New Unionism) and among intellectuals (through Fabianism) resulted in the formation of a new organisation, the Independent Labour Party. Because of this competition, the S.D.F. had by the end of the century become curiously static, considering that it was still a theoretically revolutionary body. By that time its membership total was in decline <sup>1</sup>, owing, in particular, to its opposition to the South African War, and its energy was directed into a defensive struggle against jingoism and attempts to break up socialist meetings. Local apathy was often deplored in *Justice*, the weekly organ of the party, and many branches complained of financial difficulties. The central organisation of the party, however, and with it, the publication of *Justice* were still in the hands of a small group of long standing members, later to be known as the "Old Guard" of the S.D.F.<sup>2</sup>

As late as 1900 the S.D.F. Annual Conference elected H.M. Hyndman, Harry Quelch, E. Belfort Bax, and Herbert Burrows to the Executive Council at the top of the poll.<sup>3</sup> Hyndman, the founder of the S.D.F., was a graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge, and a city man. Forceful and domineering, he readily quarrelled with any of his colleagues who stood up to him. He had financed the Federation in its early years and thereby maintained a degree of control over its policies. Harry Quelch, a trade unionist who represented the Printers' Warehousemen on the London Trades Council, was the editor of *Justice* from 1896. He taught himself French, read the French edition of *Capital* prior to its publication in English, and translated Marx's

<sup>1</sup> Activities or lack of activities of nearly 100 branches were recorded in *Justice* throughout 1900, though, according to T. A. Jackson, less than a half of these branches would be regarded as "normal", (T. A. Jackson, *Solo Trumpet*, London, 1953, p. 54). The S.D.F. claimed to represent a membership of 9,000 at the preliminary conference of the L.R.C. in 1900 (*Justice*, March 3, 1900). This figure, too, appears to have been greatly exaggerated.

<sup>2</sup> H. W. Lee and E. Archbold, *Social-Democracy in Britain* (London, 1935), p. 32. Apart from this volume, no history of the S.D.F. has been written, though something of its development may be gathered from J. Clayton, *Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain 1884-1924* (London, 1926); Max Beer, *History of British Socialism* (London, 1940); and Henry Pelling, *Origins of the Labour Party* (London, 1954).

<sup>3</sup> The Executive Council of the S.D.F. in 1900 was composed of 24 members, 12 for the London branches and 12 for the Provincial. S.D.F. Rule 15, Report of 20th Annual Conference, 1900, p. 29.

Misère de la Philosophie into English. Although he has been described as the "staunchest of Hyndman's clique",<sup>1</sup> and he himself called Hyndman "the heart and mind of the whole movement",<sup>2</sup> his closest friend appears to have been E. Belfort Bax. They dined together for many years and talked over the conduct of Justice and the socialist movement in general.<sup>3</sup> Bax, who had studied Kantian and Hegelian philosophy in Germany and had read *Capital* in German, could be regarded as the brain of the S.D.F. though he was rather a poor platform speaker. Herbert Burrows, son of a Chartist, had studied at Cambridge and was a civil servant in the Excise Department. These four were all original members of the S.D.F.; and they were either "men of (the) highly educated class" or "men of labour who educated themselves out of their class", the types of leaders who, according to Hyndman, had done "all the great work for Socialism during the last hundred years".<sup>4</sup>

A study of the S.D.F. leadership thus shows that the middle-class group was in control of the party of working-class emancipation. But class-conscious workers now began to claim the leadership of their own emancipation for themselves. The conflict was sharpened by the fact that the "Old Guard" was about a generation older than the youngest members. At the turn of the century, Hyndman was 59 years old and the average age of the four leaders was 49. This seemed to be an advanced age to the twenty-years-old who were drawn to the S.D.F. by its revolutionary propaganda.

Hyndman and his colleagues always talked about an imminent revolution, probably, as Hyndman excused himself, just for the sake of encouragement.<sup>5</sup> Capitalism was supposed to be "heading for Niagara",<sup>6</sup> and in such a cataclysmic crisis each of the S.D.F. branches was expected to "take over the function of a regional committee of public safety".<sup>7</sup> The dilemma of the S.D.F., however, was rooted in the fear that reforms directed against the abuses of the system might postpone for ever the revolution which they desired. On the one hand, the S.D.F. had succeeded in having some of its local leaders elected to town councils, boards of guardians, and school boards, where they were useless without allies. On the other hand, an election campaign was supposed to be a class war against the existing capitalist parties. Throughout its history this problem of association with major

<sup>1</sup> Pelling, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>2</sup> Harry Quelch, *Twenty Years of Socialist Agitation*, in: *Social-Democrat* vii (1903), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> E. B. Bax (ed.), *Harry Quelch, Literary Remains* (London, 1914), p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> *Justice*, Aug. 17, 1901.

<sup>5</sup> H. M. Hyndman, *Record of an Adventurous Life* (London, 1911), p. 341.

<sup>6</sup> *Justice*, April 27, 1901.

<sup>7</sup> Jackson, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

political parties had vexed the party leaders. Hyndman had been “distrusted by his enemies as a secret Tory”,<sup>1</sup> and he himself “wanted the Socialist vote to go Tory till the Liberals left them free to fight seats”.<sup>2</sup> The S.D.F.’s first parliamentary campaign in 1885 brought about the scandal of “Tory Gold”. In 1900, however, when the Khaki election took place, the S.D.F. found itself lined up with the Pro-Boer Liberals.

The S.D.F. suffered also from the lack of a definite trade union policy. In 1900 when the Labour Representation Committee refused to accept a class war resolution, the S.D.F. lost interest in Labour Alliance. Yet the withdrawal of the party from the L.R.C., which took place one year later, appeared to H.W. Lee, secretary of the S.D.F., “a sad mistake”,<sup>3</sup> and many of the Lancashire S.D.F. members, who knew the strength of the I.L.P. and the unions in the North, denounced this step as “foolish”.<sup>4</sup> About this time the Taff Vale and other legal decisions threatening the position of the unions were bringing more and more unionists to realise the importance of political action. Max Beer, London correspondent of the German Social-Democratic paper *Vorwärts*, wrote to Justice:

“We are now in Great Britain on the eve of a political labour movement. The S.D.F. has great opportunities before it. It will succeed if it will consider theory as a living guide; it will fail if it considers theory as a sacred letter, shouting ‘class struggle’ and practically standing aloof of it... I should not mind a bit if Hyndman would run on a simple labour programme, without having recourse to the usual revolutionary vocabulary”.<sup>5</sup>

The S.D.F. crisis was also a crisis for Hyndman himself as the leader of the party and self-appointed apostle of Marxism in England. As early as 1881 Hyndman had written *England for All* which he boasted was “the first Socialistic work that appeared up to 1881 in England”.<sup>6</sup> In 1896 the Twentieth Century Press, the S.D.F. printing establishment, published Hyndman’s *The Economics of Socialism* which, according to Bernstein, was “able to hold its own with the average German work devoted to the popularisation of Marx’s teaching”.<sup>7</sup> By the turn of the century Hyndman may have thought that he had

<sup>1</sup> Edward Bernstein, *My Years of Exile* (London, 1921), p. 256.

<sup>2</sup> S.D.F., Report of 20th Annual Conference, 1900, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Lee and Archbold, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

<sup>4</sup> *Justice*, Aug. 10, 1901.

<sup>5</sup> *Justice*, July 26, 1902.

<sup>6</sup> Hyndman, *op. cit.*, p. 14. Engels accused Hyndman of having plagiarised Marx in this work.

<sup>7</sup> Bernstein, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

done all that could be done in the way of popularisation to spread Marxism. At any rate, when Harry Quelch translated Marx's *Poverty of Philosophy*, he abused Quelch "like a pickpocket".<sup>1</sup> Hyndman was particularly hostile to Engels whom he regarded as an evil influence on Marx.<sup>2</sup> When Messrs. Charles H. Kerr and Co. of Chicago published an English translation of Engels' *Ursprung der Familie*, he was extremely annoyed and wrote in *Justice*: "Surely this is carrying coal to Newcastle. The German 'Origin of the Family' has always seemed to me a colossal piece of impudence... To garble Morgan's grand work (*Ancient Society*) was disgraceful".<sup>3</sup> Hyndman's disparagement of Marx and Engels certainly astonished and estranged young Marxists who were then getting their knowledge of theory from America where the publishing institutions of the Labor News Co. of New York and of Kerr and Co. of Chicago surpassed the T.C.P. by far in the publication of Marxist classics in the English language.

Hyndman had another difficulty as the leader of the S.D.F. He used to indict the Jewish financiers as solely responsible for the South African War – thus his opposition to the war did not appear to be purely socialistic. A resolution passed at the 1900 S.D.F. Annual Conference to censure anti-semitic utterances seems to have greatly impaired his prestige.<sup>4</sup> In July, 1901, Hyndman declared his intention to drop his anti-war agitation because he did not like to "help the Liberals" and also he believed that the future of South Africa should belong to the black man.<sup>5</sup> Soon Bax blamed Hyndman for having played into the hands of the jingoes,<sup>6</sup> and Theodore Rothstein accused Hyndman of having abandoned the socialist front against the war and added that "Socialist doctrines have not been (either by the S.D.F. or by Hyndman himself) translated into practice".<sup>7</sup>

Hyndman met these challenges by withdrawing from the Executive. His letter of resignation, addressed to H. W. Lee, the secretary, was read at the 1901 Annual Conference:

"...I failed to detect among the English workers that class consciousness and class antagonism without which no good whatever can be done... As one of the highly-educated well-to-do class myself, I am quite astounded at the ignorance and apathy of my country-men, and I am deeply discouraged at the result of our long-continued propaganda..."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jackson, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> Hyndman, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

<sup>3</sup> *Justice*, April 20, 1900.

<sup>4</sup> *Justice*, Aug. 11, 1900.

<sup>5</sup> *Justice*, July 20, 1901.

<sup>6</sup> *Justice*, Aug. 3, 1901.

<sup>7</sup> *Justice*, July 27, 1901.

<sup>8</sup> *Justice*, Aug. 10, 1901.

Hyndman had expressed again and again his dissatisfaction with the British working class as a potentially revolutionary force and also with the S.D.F. as a branch of the Socialist International, which he called "the largest political party in Europe".<sup>1</sup> The direct cause of his resignation, however, seems to have been his objection to the membership of the party Executive, especially to Rothstein, "a very able, enthusiastic and honest foreigner", who "has just been elected by the delegates at our Annual Conference at the head of the poll for the Executive Council of the S.D.F."<sup>2</sup> Rothstein, a Russian Jew and an able journalist, had come to England in 1891 with his father, a doctor. He had been a member of the S.D.F. since 1895 and had criticised the party for its fossilised academism.<sup>3</sup>

It may be, however, that Hyndman had detected the coming crisis of the S.D.F. and chose to be an onlooker. At any rate, Harry Quelch was still on the Executive of the party, and although not hostile to Rothstein (in fact he had welcomed Rothstein's criticism of the doctrinaire narrowness of the S.D.F.)<sup>4</sup>, he remained a great admirer of Hyndman and a close friend of Bax. His influence began to loom large and as a result despite Hyndman's temporary retirement the "Old Guard" was still in a position to control the central machinery of the S.D.F.

## II

The S.D.F. had been established in Glasgow and Edinburgh in 1884, but the branches remained few and isolated for many years. In 1898 a Scottish District Council was formed in Edinburgh for the arrangement of local and national speakers.<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of the South African War, Scotland, too, had begun to feel the effects of jingoism; branches were "lying low" and "practically doing no propaganda".<sup>6</sup> However, the summer of 1900 witnessed a "Socialist Renaissance" north of the border. In June the District Council appointed as its organiser William Gee of Northampton whose strenuous work resulted in a mushroom growth of new branches.<sup>7</sup>

The "Socialist Revival" in Scotland took place in the midst of an international controversy over the tactics to be followed to establish a Socialist Commonwealth. S. G. Yates of Leith, who had come from

<sup>1</sup> Justice, Aug. 11, 1900.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Hyndman to H. Gaylord Wilshire, Aug. 19, 1901, printed in the Challenge, Sept. 11, 1901.

<sup>3</sup> Social-Democrat iv (1900), pp. 167-174.

<sup>4</sup> Social-Democrat iv (1900), pp. 198-202.

<sup>5</sup> Lee and Archbold, op. cit., p. 141.

<sup>6</sup> Justice, Oct. 13, 1900.

<sup>7</sup> Justice, June 23 & Sept. 29, 1900.

Keir Hardie's old Scottish Labour Party, was one of the S.D.F. delegates who attended the 5th Congress of the Socialist International held in Paris in September, 1900.<sup>1</sup> The Congress had to settle the dispute about "the conquest of power and alliance with bourgeois parties", an issue that had attracted international attention since the entrance of the French Socialist Deputy, Alexandre Millerand, into the Waldeck-Rousseau Government. Yates found himself in Paris allied with the delegates from the American Socialist Labor Party and the Irish Socialist Republican Party in opposing the British delegation including the S.D.F. delegates who supported the Kautsky Resolution. This resolution denounced on principle but approved as an emergency tactic the right of socialists to enter a bourgeois government. It was adopted at the Congress by 29 votes to 9. The minority had moved in vain the Ferri-Guesde Resolution to proscribe Millebrandism as a matter of principle. Yates, who spoke French fluently, must have joined the chorus of Guesdists in shouting: "A Chalons" (the place where striking French workers were shot down by military police) and "Les bon ministeriels"<sup>2</sup>

The American S.L.P. had launched an attack on the S.D.F. soon after the 1896 London Congress of the Socialist International, where the S.L.P. delegates "worked together... for the exclusion of Anarchists, Fakirs, Fabians and all middle class groups and propositions".<sup>3</sup> Since the Paris Congress their attacks increased in vehemence and frequency,<sup>4</sup> probably because the British delegates refused to support Lucien Saniel, the S.L.P. delegate, who demanded the exclusion of the delegates from the (American) Social Democratic Party.<sup>5</sup> Soon after the Paris Congress a certain R. MacDonald of Glasgow wrote a letter to Justice:

"We in America and Canada knew that your sympathy lay with Debs and Co. (the American S.D.P.), and why shouldn't it?"

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Bell, *Pioneering Days* (London, 1941), p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> *Internationaler Sozialisten-Kongress zu Paris* (Berlin, 1900), p. 25. *Cinquième Congrès Socialiste International... Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel* (Paris, 1901), pp. 60-61, 89. George Weill, *Histoire du Mouvement Social en France 1852-1924* (Paris, 1924) 3rd ed., pp. 327-329.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Matthew Maguire to Henry Kuhn, Aug. 2, 1896, S.L.P. Papers, Wisconsin State Historical Society. See also Lucien Saniel on "An American View of the Congress", *Justice*, Aug. 22, 1896. Lucien Saniel and Arthur Keep were cordially welcomed by Hyndman and others (*Justice*, Aug. 22, 1896), but it was Keep who wrote in the *People* the first and "most scurrilous article" to abuse the S.D.F. (*Justice*, Jan. 19, 1901).

<sup>4</sup> *Justice*, April 6, 1901.

<sup>5</sup> *Cinquième Congrès Socialiste International*, p. 33. Harriman, the American S.D.P. delegate, criticised the S.L.P. trade union policy and voted with the S.D.F. delegates for the Kautsky Resolution. *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 89-90.

Birds of a feather flock together. The article in the *Daily People* truly says that the record of the S.D.F. is a record of criminal weakness, pusillanimity and shame".<sup>1</sup>

It was clear from the letter that by the end of 1900 the American S.L.P. with its weekly and daily *People* and De Leon's pamphlets had exercised considerable influence on the S.D.F. branches in Scotland.

At the half-yearly meeting of the Scottish District Council held at Falkirk on March 10, 1901, Yates moved and carried a resolution which led to the withdrawal of the Scottish S.D.F. from the Scottish Workers' Parliamentary Committee, an organisation parallel to the English L.R.C., which at its latest conference had "obliterated the few shreds of class consciousness with which it began".<sup>2</sup> This was five months before the withdrawal of the S.D.F. en bloc from the L.R.C. In the spring of the same year Gee renewed his organising work full of enthusiasm and confidence.

"This account opens with my visit to Leith. The most striking characteristic of this branch of so-called impossibilists is its inexhaustible supply of energy... Notwithstanding (my) shortcomings (I was not socialistically reared in London) great enthusiasm prevailed. ... From Leith I proceeded... to Edinburgh. This branch has quite a plethora of intellectuals within its ranks... From Edinburgh I journeyed to Falkirk. This sturdy branch, floated by me last year, and composed of a number of so-called wreckers, has waded through a most trying winter without losing a single member".<sup>3</sup>

Gee's report reveals the strength of the "impossibilist" feeling in Scotland as well as its hostility to the London leadership.

The Scottish S.D.F. found another able organiser-lecturer in James Connolly of the Irish Socialist Republican Party, who at the Paris International Socialist Congress received recognition of the I.S.R.P. as an independent national unit in spite of Hyndman's objection on legalistic grounds.<sup>4</sup> Connolly wrote to Justice saying that "the position taken up at Paris was opposed to the whole tradition and policy of the S.D.F".<sup>5</sup> He himself had been a devoted propagandist of the S.D.F.

<sup>1</sup> Justice, Nov. 24, 1900.

<sup>2</sup> Justice, March 23, 1901.

<sup>3</sup> Justice, Aug. 24, 1901. This report was published soon after the 1901 S.D.F. Annual Conference where Gee heard Quelch denouncing the "impossibilists".

<sup>4</sup> Jackson, *op. cit.*, p. 80. See also R. M. Fox, James Connolly, the Forerunner (Tralee, 1946), p. 51.

<sup>5</sup> Justice, May 25, 1901.



in Edinburgh, but in 1896 he returned to Ireland, being appointed organiser of the I.S.R.P. In 1898 he started the Workers' Republic in which he wrote:

"We are trade unionists, but we are more than trade unionists. The trade unionist who is only a trade unionist is to socialist what the believer in constitutional monarchy is to a republican".<sup>1</sup>

Though Keir Hardie loaned £50 for this new Irish paper,<sup>2</sup> the influence of the I.L.P. seems to have been nullified by that of the American S.L.P. from whom Connolly received at least \$50.<sup>3</sup> J. Bruce Glasier, Connolly's old friend, later recalled that, when in 1900 he visited Ireland on a Fabian tour, Connolly and his colleagues "belaboured the Fabian Society and myself unmercifully as agents of English reaction and compromise".<sup>4</sup> During the summer of 1901 he visited Scotland on lecture tours. In May he appeared in Glasgow.<sup>5</sup> In June he delivered one week's lectures for the Falkirk S.D.F. and was appreciated as "a rare socialist lecturer".<sup>6</sup> In July when he spoke at Leith, the branch reporter wrote to Justice:

"Comrade Connolly is certainly one of the best propagandists we have. While his lectures are scientifically accurate, they are at the same time so simple that even the most dunce of his hearers cannot fail to grasp their meaning. Like our Falkirk comrades, we can recommend the English branches to secure his services".<sup>7</sup>

Before Connolly's lecture tours went across the Tweed line, the Scottish impossibilists had had a chance to express openly their outright opposition to the S.D.F. leadership.

The 21st Annual Conference of the S.D.F. held at the Birmingham Town Hall on August 4 and 5, 1901, was a stormy gathering at which S. G. Yates, delegate from Leith, took the lead of this bold challenge. A Leith resolution to condemn those S.D.F. members who supported the Kautsky resolution had been excluded from the agenda by the Executive. L. Cotton of Reading, who represented Oxford, moved an amendment to the effect that the action of the S.D.F. delegates at the

<sup>1</sup> Workers' Republic, Aug. 27, 1898, reprinted in Desmond Ryan (ed.), James Connolly's Workers' Republic (Dublin, 1951), p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> Desmond Ryan, James Connolly (Dublin, 1924), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Connolly to the American S.L.P., March 31, 1899, S.L.P. Papers, Wisconsin State Historical Society.

<sup>4</sup> Labour Leader, May 17, 1917. See also Glasier on "Ireland as a Nation" in the Clarion, March 17, 1900.

<sup>5</sup> Justice, May 4, 1901.

<sup>6</sup> Justice, June 22, 1901.

<sup>7</sup> Justice, July 13, 1901.

Paris Congress should be repudiated because the entry of a Socialist into a ministry was a question of principle and not of tactics. The amendment was seconded by Yates and was supported by John Carstairs Matheson, a school-teacher of Falkirk whom Gee called "one of the best educated and best informed men in the whole movement",<sup>1</sup> and by Gee himself who represented the Edinburgh branch. Harry Quelch, however, showed much irritation at this audacious assault on the official S.D.F. According to the conference report:

"He (Quelch) maintained strenuously that we were not impossibilists, and circumstances must determine our policy. We must adopt any and every means to realise Social-Democracy. He himself was in favour of any means, from the ballot-box to the bomb, from political action to assassination. (Cheers) Oh, yes, the movers of the resolution cheered assassination, but they would not allow a Socialist to enter a Ministry".<sup>2</sup>

After this speech, Cotton's amendment was lost by 37 votes to 8. Then Yates moved that the party should take over Justice which was owned by the Twentieth Century Press and through the T.C.P. controlled by the "Old Guard".<sup>3</sup> But his motion was defeated by 41 votes to 17. Though the impossibilist delegates opposed impetuously an attempt at unity with the I.L.P. initiated by the Executive, they supported the leadership when Quelch moved the withdrawal of the S.D.F. from the L.R.C.

Through the Birmingham Conference the "Unholy Scotch Current" as it was called spread into London. James Connolly was invited by the Southern impossibilists and hailed as an excellent lecturer at Reading and Finsbury Park, London.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, many young S.D.F.-ers in London had been disillusioned with the Hyndmanite leadership – for instance, in 1900 T. A. Jackson and a few others suffered Hyndman's displeasure for ordering Engels' *Origin of the Family from America*.<sup>5</sup> Jackson was only 21 years old. He attended economic classes conducted by Jack Fitzgerald, a London Irishman, where he read Marx's *Capital* and also became acquainted with the American S.L.P. publi-

<sup>1</sup> Justice, Aug. 24, 1901.

<sup>2</sup> Justice, Aug. 10, 1901. It appears to have been Quelch who used for the first time – in his speech delivered at the 1901 Annual Conference – the term, "impossibilist", applied to the S.D.F. rebels in Scotland.

<sup>3</sup> Already at the 1899 Annual Conference the Scottish and Lancashire delegates expressed their dissatisfaction with the editor of Justice which they alleged was beyond the control of the Annual Conference. It was mostly the older S.D.F. members who had shares in the T.C.P. which was a limited company.

<sup>4</sup> Justice, Oct. 19, 1901.

<sup>5</sup> Jackson, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

cations and the *Weekly People*.<sup>1</sup> In Scotland, where the S.D.F. District Council had been captured by the impossibilists, economic classes were officially promoted and conducted by the branches. Thomas Bell, another young impossibilist who had been disappointed with "a bunch of bureaucrats" among the local I.L.P., joined one of these classes conducted by Yates late in 1902, when Bell was only 20 years old.<sup>2</sup> Yates had established the International Labour Literature Depot as an agency of the New York Labor News Co. in Glasgow,<sup>3</sup> and quantities of the *Weekly People* were brought over for sale in Scotland and circulated in London.<sup>4</sup> Through the economic classes and the *Weekly People* as well as Connolly's lecture tours the impossibilist movement grew up both in Scotland and London and became a serious menace to the official S.D.F.

### III

By the end of 1901 the struggle within the S.D.F. took a distinctive form and divided the party into three antagonistic groups – a right, a centre, and a left. The Lancashire S.D.F. which owed its strength to younger unionists in weaving towns was anxious to maintain its alliance with the trade unions through the L.R.C., and formed the right wing of the party. The "Old Guard", which constituted the centre group, were not so much interested in Labour Alliance with non-socialist unions as in Socialist Unity with the I.L.P. and aimed at the formation of a powerful socialist party under S.D.F. leadership. The impossibilists both in Scotland and London formed the left wing of the S.D.F., opposing not only Labour Alliance but also Socialist Unity with the non-revolutionary I.L.P. Hyndman's resignation was both a cause and a symptom of the weakness of the centre group in 1901, but its position was greatly strengthened by the Dewsbury by-election early in 1902 in which the S.D.F. won an important round of the fight for Socialist Unity. Quelch was put forward as the "Social Democratic and Trade Union Candidate"; the I.L.P. whose leaders had been hostile to the S.D.F. idea of Socialist Unity had to withdraw their own candidate, Edward R. Hartley, a Clarion vanner, who himself became one of the ardent supporters of Quelch and the S.D.F.<sup>5</sup> Quelch, though defeated in the election, secured a vote of 1,597, and regarded this as a good augury for the consolidation of socialist forces under the S.D.F. leadership.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> Bell, *op. cit.*, pp. 10 & 35.

<sup>3</sup> *Justice*, March 1, 1902. *Socialist*, Sept., 1903.

<sup>4</sup> Bell, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>5</sup> E. R. Hartley's letter on his resignation from the I.L.P. candidature appeared in the *Clarion*, Dec. 13, 1901.

<sup>6</sup> *Justice*, Feb. 1, 1902.

The left wing of the party were roused by this growing enthusiasm for Socialist Unity on the part of the centre group. They had to consolidate their forces, and soon the 1902 Annual Conference enabled the Scottish and London impossibilists to form a united front against the official leadership. The Conference was held at the Blackburn Town Hall, on March 28, 29, and 30, two months after the Dewsbury by-election. Socialist Unity was in the air. It was proposed to send a fraternal greeting to the I.L.P. conference which was held at the same time in Liverpool. The resolution was carried by 54 votes to 22 in spite of strong opposition from Yates (Leith), Fitzgerald (who represented the Burnbank branch, Glasgow), and Jack Kent (Central West Ham, London). The impossibilist delegates from Scotland and London supported each other. Three of them were elected to the Executive, namely, Jack Kent, Alexander Anderson (Edinburgh), and L. Cotton. Again the impossibilists (the Left) identified themselves with the official S.D.F. (the Centre) in voting down the Lancashire (Right wing) resolution to rejoin the L.R.C. The Scottish impossibilists went further and demanded a policy of dual unionism, i.e., the formation of new socialist trade unions.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of the Blackburn Conference, friendly relations were set up between Scotland and London. Percy Friedberg of Finsbury Park was selected as liaison agent for London to work in conjunction with the Scottish members.<sup>2</sup> The report of the Blackburn conference as published by the official S.D.F. contained some inaccuracies which seem to have been related to the omission from the report of any mention of George Lansbury's retirement from his parliamentary candidature.<sup>3</sup> Friedberg, therefore, wrote to Justice correcting the inaccuracy of the official report. Quelch refused publication of his letter; but the letter was also sent to New York and the Weekly People published it in their summary of the S.D.F. conference.<sup>4</sup> A London Executive meeting held on May 20 passed a resolution to expel Friedberg.<sup>5</sup> The Finsbury Park branch stood by Friedberg and was promptly threatened with expulsion. For the first time, the London impossibilists held a meeting of their own at the Socialist Club, Finsbury Park, to discuss the matter. Jack Fitzgerald and Con Lehane, another Irishman who was a former secretary of the Cork branch of

<sup>1</sup> Justice, April 5, 1902.

<sup>2</sup> Jack Fitzgerald, "The S.P.G.B. and (the) S.L.P. A statement of difference", Socialist Standard, Aug., 1906.

<sup>3</sup> S. G. Yates, 'The Official S.D.F.', Socialist, March, 1903. Neil Maclean in the Weekly People, July 11, 1903. Lansbury has been the S.D.F. candidate for Bow and Bromley.

<sup>4</sup> Weekly People, April 15, 1902.

<sup>5</sup> Minutes of the Executive meeting on May 20, 1902, quoted by J. C. Matheson in the Socialist, Sept., 1906.

the I.S.R.P., advised the Finsbury Park branch to avoid any danger of expulsion. The branch, however, refused to yield and was expelled.<sup>1</sup> That was the first of a series of incidents which finally led to the collapse of co-operation among the impossibilists.

Already at a meeting of the Scottish District Council held in March, 1901, it had been resolved that a socialist paper supported by the branches should be established in Scotland.<sup>2</sup> Without a wealthy supporter, however, it was beyond the means of the Scottish impossibilists to finance an independent paper and to find a proper printing place. It was not until the early summer of 1902 when the expelled Finsbury Park branch agreed to provide a portion of the funds in return for the printing of a branch statement that they found themselves in a position to launch the paper.<sup>3</sup> The London impossibilists who were more cautious than the Scotsmen in their expression of impossibilism seem to have imposed a condition that leading articles in the new socialist paper should be approved by the London men before publication.<sup>4</sup> James Connolly agreed to print the paper in Dublin. In August, 1902, appeared the first number of the Socialist printed at the Workers' Publishing Co., Dublin, and published by the S.D.F. Scottish District Council, Edinburgh. The editorial in the first issue, entitled "Ourselves", was an attack on imperialism rather than a direct challenge to the official S.D.F.

Throughout the summer of 1902 Connolly was on a lecture tour in Scotland and Lancashire. On August 16 a social gathering was held at the S.D.F. club of Salford as a send off for Connolly who was about to sail for the United States to undertake four months' lecturing tour under the auspices of the American S.L.P.<sup>5</sup> His influence in Scotland had resulted not only in the establishment of the Socialist but also in the revival of republicanism. Occasion for the latter was provided by King Edward's coronation in 1902 and the S.D.F.'s "Open Letter to the King" which stated:

"by using your position to improve the well-being of Englishmen at home and to save from utter ruin their greatest dependency abroad, ... you can secure for yourself a name in history which mankind will look back to with admiration and respect".<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W. S. Jerman, "The London impossibilist movement and the men who built it up", *Socialist*, Dec., 1906.

<sup>2</sup> *Justice*, March 23, 1901.

<sup>3</sup> Jerman, loc. cit. Fitzgerald, loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup> Jackson, op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>5</sup> *Justice*, Aug. 30, 1902.

<sup>6</sup> *Justice*, June 21, 1902. The "Open Letter" was published on June 16.

This Socialist advice to the King was too much for republican Scotsmen. An editorial of the Glasgow Herald criticised “the most remarkable document which traces its origin to the coronation”: “Clearly it is not in New Zealand alone that Socialism and Imperialism are about to go hand in hand”.<sup>1</sup> The first article in the first number of the Socialist entitled “Monarchy and Revolution”, and signed “J.C.M.” (J. C. Matheson), read as follows: “Monarchy or any other non-elective office or position is an insult to the sovereignty of the people. It is the very citadel of capital in times of revolutionary energy, as at present”.<sup>2</sup>

The September 1902 issue of the Socialist contained an advertisement, “American Pamphlets for Sale”: and De Leon’s articles were constantly copied from the Weekly People. The issues of April and May 1903 contained part of De Leon’s Two Pages of Roman History under the heading, “A Brilliant Analogy” – “just as with the Plebs leader, the labour leader sees no way out of the existing Social System...” Meanwhile, the Socialist continued its relentless attacks in transatlantic style on the “fakirs” who sought to beguile the working class from the straight path of class warfare.

It was George Lansbury who was singled out by the Socialist as most worthy of their special reproach – he was accused of having advocated “an alliance with radicals entirely in the Bernsteinian spirit”.<sup>3</sup> Another Bernsteinian in the S.D.F. was Max Beer, who had served the American S.L.P. which he criticised in his letters to Justice and who denounced the impossibilists’ tactics as utopian and sectarian, while praising Robert Blatchford for his tactics which, as set forth in his Britain for the British, – Beer said – “are, in my judgement, thoroughly in harmony with the spirit of Marx”.<sup>4</sup> The impossibilists were impartial in their attacks on all union and socialist leaders as “fakirs” – whether they belonged to the official S.D.F., the I.L.P., the L.R.C., or the trade unions, all provided abundant material for their bitter criticism.

Discipline was strictly enforced among the impossibilists, for it was imperative for them to maintain their group’s esprit de corps. Shortly before the establishment of the impossibilist paper, A. Anderson, secretary of the Scottish District Council and of the S.D.F. Edinburgh

<sup>1</sup> Glasgow Herald, June 19, 1902.

<sup>2</sup> Socialist, Aug., 1902.

<sup>3</sup> Lansbury’s letter dated Feb. 23rd, 1902, to the Executive of the S.D.F. was later published in the Socialist, May, 1905. Lansbury wrote in this letter: “I don’t agree with the policy of fighting independently”.

<sup>4</sup> Max Beer, “The Politics of Marxism”, Justice, Aug. 9, 1902. See also Beer on “My experience in the S.L.P.”, Justice, Oct. 19, 1901. Beer was in the S.L.P. from Oct., 1898, to Oct., 1899. “Max Beer”, Social-Democrat vi (1902), pp. 227-228. Beer, Fifty Years of International Socialism (London, 1935), pp. 108, 111, 116. Beer, History of British Socialism, p. 355.

branch, had been expelled from his own branch. When his branch was asked to contribute its quota for the fund of the new monthly paper, Anderson had insisted that unless they could issue a weekly he would not commit himself to this adventurous scheme. It was widely believed that Anderson had failed to provide the money because he had pilfered from the branch treasury.<sup>1</sup>

Apparently there were two schools of thought as to the tactics of the impossibilist revolt. Those who believed that "the Blackburn (conference) effectively destroyed the dream that the S.D.F. could be transformed"<sup>2</sup> were prepared to form a new party. Those who thought they were not strong enough, especially in London where the malcontents were not well organised, were reluctant to rise openly against the S.D.F. Furthermore, those who had closer contact with the official S.D.F. either on the Executive (like Jack Kent and A. Anderson) or at the London Central Branch dinner meetings (like Fitzgerald)<sup>3</sup> might have thought it more desirable to adopt the tactics of "boring from within" the S.D.F. Scotland had captured the District Council which could easily be transformed into the nucleus of the new party. London was hesitant and divided.

Although the Scottish impossibilists could be blamed for their sectionalism, they had an even bolder idea than that of forming an independent party. On February 8, 1903, a half-yearly meeting of the District Council was held in Glasgow and it was reported that "some very important business was transacted, dealing with the condition of the Federation in Scotland".<sup>4</sup> S. G. Yates, it was decided, was to be put forward as their parliamentary candidate in Leith burghs. Further, it was agreed to engage James Connolly, who had just returned from the United States, as organiser for three months starting in May. About two months before this conference, a mass meeting was held in the Manhattan Lyceum Annex, New York, to bid farewell to Connolly on his departure from America. De Leon addressed the meeting and declared that

"it was the historic mission of America to liberate the world... Ireland, Finland, Poland, – all struggling subjected nations will realise their freedom when, and only when the red flag of the Socialist Republic flutters from the Capitol at Washington".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J. C. Matheson in *Socialist*, Sept., 1906.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Fitzgerald seems to have played an active part at the T.C.P. shareholders meetings. *Justice*, June 25, 1904.

<sup>4</sup> *Socialist*, March, 1903.

<sup>5</sup> *Socialist*, Jan., 1903.

Connolly seems to have returned to Dublin with a new idea – to work for American socialism which would eventually emancipate Ireland. This may account in part for his deliberate emigration to America in September, 1903.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the *Socialist*, which had been printed in Dublin since its first number, failed to come out in February, and from March it was printed in Edinburgh. The last issue printed in Dublin, i.e., the January (1903) number, looked almost like an I.S.R.P. organ, containing an “Irish Socialist Election Address” by Connolly, Dublin election returns which reported his defeat, and an article by Connolly on “Labour in Irish History”. The *Workers’ Republic* issued its last number in May when Connolly left Dublin for Scotland; and the *Socialist* of August 1903 announced that the Scottish paper would be sent to all subscribers to the *Workers’ Republic*. Therefore, it may be that at the February meeting of the Scottish District Council it was decided to transform the Scottish S.D.F. into an independent group in May, so as to take the place of Connolly and his party and help the emancipation of the working class not only in Scotland and Ireland but also in England through co-operating with De Leon in his sacred mission of the world revolution. Yates was chosen as the first man to herald the world revolution by openly declaring their independence from the opportunist S.D.F. His article entitled “The Official S.D.F.” appeared in the March issue of the *Socialist*. It was the ultimatum to the official S.D.F., but a Scottish ultimatum with which the London men insisted they had nothing to do.

London remained undecided. Without a detailed knowledge of what was going on in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dublin, or New York, the London impossibilists could hardly regard the January issue of the *Socialist* as an issue of the organ of their movement. Moreover, the important part of the February meeting of the Scottish District Council was a secret conference which caused some suspicion among the London men as to the financial conduct of the *Socialist*.<sup>2</sup> Yates’s article on “The Official S.D.F.” was regarded by Jackson as a breach of their agreement.<sup>3</sup> To make matters worse, Friedberg, liaison agent for London, had gone to Spain early in 1903, and his place was taken by Fitzgerald who had distrusted the conduct of the Scottish paper. The second London impossibilist meeting held in April, 1903, at the Hope Coffee Tavern, Finsbury Park, caused more confusion and suspicion. Eventually 9 men out of 16 present agreed that “the Scottish section were forcing matters without having properly consulted the London men”, and it was further decided to hold a Scotland-London

<sup>1</sup> *Socialist*, Aug., 1903.

<sup>2</sup> Fitzgerald, loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup> Jackson, op. cit., p. 65.



joint conference on Easter Sunday when the Scotsmen would be in London to attend the S.D.F. Annual Conference.<sup>1</sup>

## IV

The 23rd S.D.F. Annual Conference was held on April 10, 11, and 12, 1903, at the Shoreditch Town Hall, London. The impossibilists were sparsely represented. Yates was accused of obstruction of the practical measure being taken for Socialist Unity, and of refusal to sell Justice and T.C.P. literature. His expulsion was moved and carried by 56 votes to 6. There was not a single impossibilist on the newly elected Executive.<sup>2</sup>

On the evening of April 11, the day when Yates was expelled, a Scotland-London joint impossibilist conference was held at the Cock Hoop Tavern, Mile End, where Yates urged the formation of a national party. W. S. Jerman, a London impossibilist who later joined the Scottish party, was elected secretary to a committee of five London men who were to arrange further action on this proposal. "Everybody was apparently satisfied", said Jerman.<sup>3</sup> However, Fitzgerald, who had been acting as liaison agent, was apparently disappointed, though he was elected a member of the new liaison committee. "This meeting produced another surprise", wrote Fitzgerald:

"...during the whole time they (the Scottish members) were supposed to be working with the London section for the re-organisation of the S.D.F., they were playing a double game by forming a new organisation in secret... The London section were no more ready to blindly follow would-be geniuses from Scotland than "highly educated" leaders from Queen Anne's Gate (Hyndman's residence)".<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, the Scottish impossibilists drew up their manifesto to announce the formation of the new party and sent it to London to be endorsed. It was now May. The London men held a third meeting at the Hope Coffee Tavern, where despite Anderson's reviling of Yates a few London men supported the new party. But an unfavourable comment on the balance-sheet of the Socialist stifled any further expression of sympathy with the Scottish party. Jerman was instructed to write to Scotland to announce their refusal to co-operate with the Scotsmen.<sup>5</sup> The Scotland-London alliance thus collapsed. Jealousy,

<sup>1</sup> Jerman, loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup> S.D.F., Report of 23rd Annual Conference, 1903.

<sup>3</sup> Jerman, loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup> Fitzgerald, loc. cit.

<sup>5</sup> Jerman, loc. cit.

suspicion, self-seeking, and above all the poverty of these socialists who had to grapple with difficult financial problems, ended this alliance which, according to its authors, was supposed to usher in the era of world emancipation.

The May 1903 issue of the *Socialist* announced the formation of the Socialist Labour Party. The question of the party name had worried the Scottish impossibilists who were anxious not to create any suspicion that they were merely the tool of the American S.L.P. "It was Connolly", wrote Bell, "who with characteristic directness, proposed The Socialist Labour Party. It doesn't matter what you call yourself... You'll be dubbed the S.L.P. anyway".<sup>1</sup> The "Manifesto to the Working Class" pointed out the futility of the efforts of "self-styled labour leaders", and emphasized "the political overthrow of capitalism as an absolutely necessary preliminary to the emancipation of the working class, and the establishment of the Socialist Republic".<sup>2</sup> The S.L.P. programme, however, included several immediate measures: the legal eight-hour day, abolition of child labour, graduated income-tax, nationalisation and democratic control of all industries, abolition of all hereditary authorities, national referendum on foreign affairs, full enfranchisement of the people.<sup>3</sup> On June 6 and 7, 1903, the first S.L.P. Conference was held in Edinburgh with James Connolly as chairman. Neil Maclean was elected National Secretary.<sup>4</sup> The formation of socialist trade unions was proposed but it was agreed that the party should at first endeavour to establish a favourable position among various trades. In the autumn of the same year the S.L.P. fought its first municipal elections in Leith and Glasgow and polled 796 votes. "Socialist Vote in Great Britain - 796", said the *Socialist*.<sup>5</sup>

In May, 1903, there were only 4 branches supporting the new party - Edinburgh, Falkirk, Glasgow and Leith, though they were reinforced within a few months by Kirkcaldy, East London (the former Bethnal Green branch of the S.D.F.), and Southampton. The party membership in total appears to have been between 100 and 200.<sup>6</sup> In September,

<sup>1</sup> Bell, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>2</sup> *Socialist*, May, 1903. The manifesto was separately printed as a part of Platform of the Socialist Labour Party (1903?).

<sup>3</sup> Platform of the Socialist Labour Party. The Platform was also published in the *Socialist*, Nov., 1905. The immediate measures of the S.L.P. tally with the palliatives of the S.D.F. programme.

<sup>4</sup> Maclean had been secretary of the Glasgow Clarion Scouts and came over to the impossibilists' ranks. After a few years' devoted work, he was expelled from the S.L.P. Bell, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>5</sup> *Socialist*, Nov., 1903.

<sup>6</sup> The S.L.P. delegates to the 1904 Amsterdam International Socialist Congress reported its membership at a little over 200. *Socialist*, Sept., 1904.

1903, Connolly emigrated to America. In the same month the Executive of the S.L.P. announced the resignation of Yates from editorship of the Socialist. Yates moved to Middlesbrough and soon disappeared from the scene. William Gee, the former organiser of the Scottish impossibilists, remained with the S.D.F. and was still in demand as an organiser in Lancashire and the Midlands.<sup>1</sup>

The majority of the London impossibilists did not join the S.L.P. E. Ernest Hunter, the London agent for the Scottish party, was only 19 years old in 1903, and was not favourably regarded by other self-styled impossibilist leaders. Meanwhile, the S.D.F. became more intransigent than before in clearing the party of every malcontent. The 24th Annual Conference held on April 1, 2, and 3, 1904, at St. James's Hall, Burnley, provided the final act of the impossibilist struggle inside the S.D.F. The London impossibilists were fully represented at the conference. Herbert Burrows moved a resolution to call upon the impossibilists at once to apologise for having pursued disruptive tactics. The resolution was carried with 6 dissenting votes, all impossibilist – Battersea (2), Peckham & Dulwich, Wood Green, Central West Ham, and Watford. Quelch rose and spoke warmly:

“‘Comrade’ Hawkins (Central West Ham) does not say that the Executive is corrupt, but it looks like it!... This is the sort of slander and calumny which is being continually put around, and which is paralysing our efforts in all directions”.<sup>2</sup>

Then referring to Fitzgerald who represented Watford, Quelch continued:

“he had been more cute than Hawkins; he had not written letters and made statements publicly, but he had held ‘economic classes’ ... he had continually worn the S.L.P. button at S.D.F. meetings, and had refused to desist from exhibiting it”.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Justice, July 18, et seqq.

<sup>2</sup> In this speech, Quelch seems to have animadverted on the disruptive influence Hawkins had exerted upon the S.D.F. London District Council (that had been reorganised in October, 1903 – Justice, Oct. 10, 1903), though the fact did not appear in the Conference Report and the District Council later protested against Quelch for his exaggerated view of Hawkins' influence (Justice, May 14, 1904). “The impossibilist section of West Ham Social-Democrats, as personified by H. J. Hawkins of the Central Branch”, had been accused of having held aloof from the borough council elections (Justice, Nov. 14, 1903). H. J. Hawkins had been a member of the Executive of the London Trades Council early in 1904 (45th Annual Report of the L.T.C., p. 27). He became one of the Executive members of the S.P.G.B. when it was formed, but was expelled from the new party early in 1905. He applied for a membership of the S.L.P. without success (Socialist Standard, May, 1905). Later he emigrated to Australia where he was involved in industrial unionism (Socialist, Jan., 1909).

<sup>3</sup> S.D.F., Report of 24th Annual Conference, 1904, p. 13.

Dan Irving of Burnley moved the expulsion of Hawkins and Fitzgerald which was carried by 61 votes to 8.

A meeting held by the followers of Hawkins and Fitzgerald on June 12, 1904, at the Printers' Hall, Bartlett's Passage, Fetter Lane, formally announced the formation of the Socialist Party of Great Britain.<sup>1</sup> The first issue of the *Socialist Standard*, the party organ, appeared in September, 1904, its declared purpose being to raise the standard of socialism that had been, in the eyes of the impossibilists, shamelessly lowered by the S.D.F.<sup>2</sup> C. Lehane was appointed General Secretary.<sup>3</sup> The party membership in total appears to have been nearly 100.<sup>4</sup> By September 14 branches had been formed – all in London with the exception of Watford. The first Annual Conference of the S.P.G.B. held on April 20, 1905, declared “the beginning of the modern revolutionary movement.” The “revolutionary” S.P.G.B. had no interest in “palliatives”, and “the Socialist Party’s constitution” ignored every immediate measure.<sup>5</sup> The S.P.G.B. chose to become a complete impossibilist party and this was indeed the logical conclusion of the impossibilist revolt.

Both the S.L.P. and the S.P.G.B. urged the working class to abstain from voting in the 1906 General Election – the S.L.P. as a matter of tactics, and the S.P.G.B. as an act of principle. The S.L.P. was ready to co-operate with the American I.W.W. in propagating industrial unionism, though the S.P.G.B. denounced this new tendency as “the farce of... the S.T. and L.A. (De Leon’s Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance)”.<sup>6</sup>

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The revolt was complete, for the rebellious impossibilists had won their independence at last. However, the main cause of the revolt, i.e., the question of reform or revolution, did not appear to have been solved by this uprising, which was in itself nothing but an indication of the existence of the problem. Most of the founders of the S.L.P. and the S.P.G.B. were young and sanguine socialists anxious to follow the straight path of Marxism which appeared to them to have been abandoned by the S.D.F. “Old Guard.” But they failed to secure a grip like that of the “Old Guard” on their own revolutionary parties,

<sup>1</sup> S.P.G.B., *Questions of the Day*, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> *Socialist Standard*, Sept., 1904.

<sup>3</sup> *Socialist Standard*, Oct., 1904. Lehane resigned his position in 1905 and emigrated to the United States. T. A. Jackson, who was elected General Secretary in 1906, resigned from the S.P.G.B. early in 1909.

<sup>4</sup> *Socialist*, June, 1904.

<sup>5</sup> *Socialist Standard*, May, 1905.

<sup>6</sup> *Socialist Standard*, July, 1906.

and it soon became clear that their interpretations of Marxist tactics were again divided on political action, trade unionism, and socialist unity, the very questions which caused their original revolt. Moreover, the party members remained for several years only a few hundreds. Although the S.L.P. developed into a more or less national party its membership was small, and the S.P.G.B. remained confined to the London area. The higher the original ambition of these socialists, the greater must have been their disillusion. Furthermore, there were personal ill-will, bitterness, and misunderstanding between the two rival parties and even within each party. It is not surprising to find that many of the original leaders of the impossibilist movement disappeared one after another from the scene of their parties' struggle for existence. Yet, the two parties survived: the S.L.P. through development of interest in industrial unionism especially on Clydeside went on to become an important component of the Communist Party of Great Britain, and the S.P.G.B. through its insistent propaganda against opportunism has managed to maintain its separate existence to the present day.