

# Democratic Socialism in Britain

George Bernard Shaw (Editor)  
Fabian Essays

Edited by  
David Reisman



**DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM  
IN BRITAIN**



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# DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM IN BRITAIN

Classic Texts in Economic and Political Thought  
1825–1952

*Edited by*  
DAVID REISMAN

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GEORGE BERNARD SHAW  
EDITOR

Fabian Essays

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## INTRODUCTION

### FABIAN ESSAYS

Dr. Thomas Davidson, born in Aberdeen, based in New York, founded the Fellowship of the New Life in London in September 1883. Protestant, even secular, the Fellowship was modelled on Antonio Rosmini-Serbati's Catholic order, the Institute of the Brethren of Charity, established earlier in the century and the subject of Davidson's *The Philosophical System of Antonio Rosmini-Serbati* (1882). Davidson was a classical scholar and progressive educationalist whose *Aristotle and Ancient Educational Ideals* (1882), like his *The Moral Aspects of the Economic Question* (1888), had suggested that social change is needed but that the means could only be the gradual improvement of each individual's own character. Davidson had been to Rome to discuss moral regeneration with the Pope. The *Vita Nuova* was the antidote that he had found for the ethical normlessness of the acquisitive society.

Davidson's message of spirituality and community was eminently attractive to young discontents who, appalled by the poverty and the divisiveness that competitive capitalism was making a part of the system, nonetheless sought a fulfilling alternative that would soar beyond economics alone. Edward Pease and Frank Podmore joined the Fellowship after an evening spent discussing the theories of Henry George. What sets them apart from the legions of others who had turned to reform under the influence of *Progress and Poverty* (1879) is the fact that their long night of the soul took place in a haunted house in Notting Hill while they were waiting for a ghost to appear. The Benthamites could promise the franchise and the Owenites were committed to cooperatives. A sympathy with the down-trodden in combination with an interest in the paranormal was, however, less well represented in the British political culture of September 1883.

The Fellowship survived until 1898: its members included William Clarke, Hubert Bland, Havelock Ellis and Ramsay MacDonald. It published the *Seedtime*, held lectures and meetings, and established a communal residence at 49, Doughty Street. The members hoped that the real-world example of property held in common would be attractive enough to

convert others to the cause of brotherhood, community and unselfish sharing. The idealism was impressive; but still there were Fellows who wanted the reconstruction of society to proceed at a faster pace. On 4 January 1884, meeting at Edward Pease's rooms at 17 Osaburgh Street (the site is now occupied by the White House Hotel), the activists withdrew from the Fellowship to form the Fabian Society. The first Fabian Lecture was delivered on 25 January 1884: the speaker was J.G. Stapleton and the subject 'Social Conditions in England with a view to Social Reconstruction or Development'. The first Fabian Tract, *Why Are The Many Poor*, was published in April 1884: the author was W.L. Phillips, house-painter and Comtean developmentalist. Of the original 20 members in a Society always overwhelmingly middle class, Phillips was the only one to have a genuinely proletarian background. His Tract eventually sold over 100,000 copies. In it he said that it was the capitalist system first and foremost that had made the many poor.

Capitalism and poverty were under critical scrutiny in the 1880s as seldom before. The long period of Victorian prosperity, followed as it had been by depression and unemployment, had bred disillusionment with an invisible hand that was defaulting on its evolutionary promise of across-the-board betterment. The British government, absorbed by events in Egypt, Ireland, Afghanistan and Zululand, was showing little interest in further reform on the model of the Education Act of 1870 despite the extension in the franchise that had effectively delivered manhood suffrage by 1884. Mearns's *Bitter Cry of Outcast London* drew attention in 1883 to the extent of social squalor and to the plight of the dispossessed. His message was reinforced by Booth, whose early volume on *Labour and Life of the People*, appearing in 1889, presented statistical evidence to show that fully 30% of the population of London were living in absolute deprivation. The 1880s was a troubled decade in which the middle classes, suffering from what Beatrice Webb was to call a 'new consciousness of sin', were channelling their guilt, their Evangelical Christianity, their sense of responsibility into the caring paternalism of Samuel Barnett's Toynbee Hall (founded in the same year as the Fabian Society) and Charles Dilke's Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes. The 1880s was also a decade of unfamiliar militancy in which the workers themselves were interpreting self-help to include fighting back: thence the rioting of the unemployed in the cold winter of 1885-6, 'Bloody Sunday' in Trafalgar Square in 1887, the London dock strike of 1889 that drew attention to the low pay and bad conditions of the seasonal and the unskilled in whom the old-style crafts unions took as little interest as the employers out of whom Ben Tillett and

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John Burns in the docks were ultimately able to squeeze the disputed sixpence. Many in Britain hoped or feared that the socialist revolution was just around the corner. Hyndman changed the name of the Democratic Federation to the Social Democratic Federation in August 1884. He predicted that the socialist revolution would occur in 1889, marking the centenary of the fall of the Bastille.

Capitalism and poverty were under critical scrutiny in the decade of doubt into which the new Fabian Society was born. One consequence of the climate of events and ideas was that the Fabians, by the time of their sixth meeting in March 1884, had decided that they were Fabian *socialists* and not simply social engineers. In their third tract (*To Provident Landlords and Capitalists*, written by Shaw) in June 1885 they made their first public declaration of the fact that the new Fabian Society had in view 'the advance of Socialism in England'. Yet Morris's Socialist League and Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation were both committed to the same high objective. Bland had been a member of the Federation and joined the League while a Fabian as well. Keddell was in the Federation at the same time as he was serving as the (first) Secretary of the new Society. The lines between the groupings were not clear-cut. The Fabians were nonetheless of the opinion that the overlap was not so extensive as to obviate the need for an independent force.

Thus the Democratic Federation had become an explicitly Marxian movement in 1883 whereas the early Fabians were more in the tradition of Carlyle and Ruskin on ugliness and waste, Bentham and Mill on happiness through equalisation, Ricardo and George on land and surplus, the Christian socialists on the Good Samaritan, T.H. Green on *freedom to*. Pease had read *Capital* (in French) in 1883. Not so the others, he recalled: 'I do not think that any of the original Fabians had read the book or had assimilated its ideas at the time the Society was formed.' When later they did read it, they found it too foreign and too abstract. The Fabian socialists shared Marx's vision of historical inevitability, of the transcendence of individualism, of the single-class society. They agreed with Marx that the oligopolistic trust is at variance with the logic of the competitive market and that the separation of ownership from control erodes the legitimacy of the capitalist turned rentier. United with Marx in their hostility to the means of production under the dominance of private profit-seekers, still, however, the Fabians differed from Marx in their attitude to the laws of capitalism and the transition to the new. The Fabians defined a social class as a status group and not (especially significant in the case of the white-collar worker or the managerial proletarian) a factor of production.

They went beyond Marx by emphasising the importance of non-economic motivation and causality. They criticised Marx for insisting that the State remains subservient to the interests of the propertied classes. They argued for ideas and for social change triggered by the education of public opinion. They increasingly rejected the substance of the labour theory (Sidney Webb's statement in his *Facts* of 1888, that 'labour is the only source of value', is the kind of simplification that Fabians were soon taking care to avoid) and turned instead to the prices shadowing utilities that had been expounded by the socialist Wicksteed on the shoulders of the liberal Jevons. The Fabians, in short, were more frequently at odds with Marx than they were in agreement with him. That being the case, they would not have felt themselves completely at home either in the League or in the Federation.

Most important of all was the status of class war and the class struggle. Conspicuously middle-class, not infrequently elitist, the Fabians saw no reason to look to the proletariat for a lead. Nor did they share the confidence of Morris and Hyndman in the efficacy of force and violence: the capitalists were strong enough to put down a revolutionary confrontation, they reasoned, but too weak nonetheless to stand in the way of 'the inevitability of gradualness' that was therefore the more effective as well as the more humane scenario. In that sense the British Fabians were only loosely the intellectual heirs to Fabius Cunctator, enemy of Hannibal, from whom they took their name. Fabius the Delayer told his troops to wait patiently – and then to strike hard. The Fabians, on the other hand, never wanted to strike hard – but only to rely on the *festina lente* of managed evolution. Morris and Hyndman took part in the demonstrations of the unemployed in 1886 and 1887. The Fabians did not. Instead they wrote a report on *The Government Organization of Unemployed Labour*; they made proposals for the peaceful taxation of unearned income; they proposed the extension of the Factory Acts to embrace the eight-hour day; they moved towards an endorsement of nationalisation (of railways, canals, coal-mines) and of municipalisation (of water and gas, the docks and the tramways); they demanded State support for the education, housing and health care of the working classes; they called for annual Parliaments, women's suffrage, the payment of Members of Parliament – and (a requirement that they did not relax until 1918) for the immediate abolition of the hereditary House of Lords. Less dramatic than the fall of the Bastille, it was their conviction that the edifice of socialism had to be built up brick by brick. The League and the Federation tended to see the gradualist's enterprise as somewhat more of an abdication than an acceptance of the duty to get involved.

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There were personality differences too that made some Fabians anxious to seek out an independent force. Hyndman in particular was widely regarded as irritable, aggressive, over-serious and over-ambitious. The Fabians (who had no party-political aspirations of their own) were alienated by Hyndman's attempts to make the Federation into a Parliamentary party. They were also angered by the deviousness of his tactics: the Federation was discredited in the General Election of 1885 not only by the low poll recorded for each of its three candidates but also by the discovery that Hyndman had accepted finance ('Tory gold') from the Conservative Party, eager to split the Liberal vote. A number of Fabians (including virtually all the Essayists of 1889) spoke at Federation rallies; and Shaw (with Morris and Hyndman) was active in drawing up the unity *Manifesto of English Socialists* that in 1893 sought to demonstrate the extent of the common ground. Shaw attended the Sunday evening lectures of Morris's breakaway Hammersmith Socialist Society: at one point he and May Morris were said to be betrothed. Links and collaborative ventures there undoubtedly were. Irrespective of the contacts, however, the Fabians believed that they were significantly different from other socialists and that they had to remain an independent force.

In 1887, three years after its foundation, the Fabian Society at last adopted its first constitution. With one exception (an amendment calling for women's rights was added in 1907) the 'Rules and Basis of the Society' – the 'Fabian Basis' of 1887 – was to survive unchanged until 1919. It was the only statement of principle that was binding on all the members. The Tracts and the *Fabian Essays*, in the last analysis only the views of the individual authors, did not commit the Society or define its consensus.

The 'Basis' affirmed that the Fabian Society was on the Left ('The Fabian Society consists of Socialists') and that it stood unreservedly for communal ownership: 'It therefore aims at the reorganisation of Society by the emancipation of Land and Industrial Capital from individual and class ownership, and the vesting of them in the community for the general benefit.' The 'Basis' recommended that the transfer of assets ought to proceed 'without compensation' (just as British slave-traders had been paid no compensation when the slave-trade had been abolished in 1807) – but it also specified that the socialisation of the idle owners' claims ought to be 'not without such relief to expropriated individuals as may seem fit to the community'. The 'Basis' evidently committed the Society both to confiscation and to purchase. In fact, payment for property-rights almost immediately became the *de facto* position.

The 'Basis' emphasized that the socialists' ends were properly to be

attained through patient persuasion and the dissemination of information: 'For the attainment of these ends the Fabian Society looks to the spread of Socialist opinions, and the social and political changes consequent thereupon. It seeks to achieve these ends by the general dissemination of knowledge as to the relation between the individual and society in its economic, ethical and political aspects'. Gradualism in the sense of the 'Basis' clearly meant the researching and lecturing of a teaching order: as Shaw once told Bernstein, the Fabians were to be 'the Jesuits of Socialism'. Gradualism did not mean the formation of a new political party or a special relationship with an existing one. It was only when the rules were re-drafted in 1919 that a single allegiance was made explicit: 'The Society is a constituent of the Labour Party'.

Yet socialist parties on the Continent had come into being which had pioneered successfully the non-revolutionary route. Some Fabians in 1887 wanted the Society to do more than simply to propagandise and to permeate. They, in the same year as the 'Basis', formed themselves into the Fabian Parliamentary League. The membership was separate and optional for no more than a year. In 1888 the League was officially absorbed as the Political Committee of the Society. The Committee existed to influence the State rather than to become a part of it. Even so, the concession was enough to force the revolutionaries and the anarchists either to leave the Society altogether or to play a less active part in its deliberations. A conspicuous loss was Mrs. Charlotte Wilson who would otherwise almost certainly have been one of the Essayists of 1889.

The Fabians in the 1880s strove to get their message across principally by means of their writings and their public lectures. The title of their second Tract (Shaw's *A Manifesto*, 1884), of their fourth Tract (Mrs. Wilson's *What Socialism Is*, 1886), of their sixth Tract (Shaw's *The True Radical Programme*, 1887) gives an idea of the task of educating for a change that they had set themselves. One of the most influential of the early Tracts was *Facts for Socialists* (1887). Written by Sidney Webb, the Tract stated for the first time what was to become a key tenet of the Fabian movement – that no reasonable person who has been told the facts can fail to reject capitalism as brutal, inefficient and unjust.

Another influential Tract was *Capital and Land* (1888) by Sydney Olivier. Building on the insights of Henry George, the author took the opportunity to inform the advocates of the single tax and the nationalisation of land that no less convincing a case could be made for the collectivisation of the demand-determined interest-increment on capital as well. Olivier's Tract in 1888, Webb's paper in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics* in the

same year, Shaw's contribution to the *Fabian Essays* in 1889, Shaw's Tract on *The Impossibilities of Anarchism* in 1893 – high-profile publications such as these give the impression that early Fabians as a body regarded land-rent and quasi-rent as especially virulent strains of the unearned surplus. The impression is a misleading one. Of 212 Fabian Tracts published up to 1924, not more than five conclude that the surplus of rent is any more of an abuse than any other instance of reward without exertion.

Communicating through their writings, the Fabians also made use of public lectures to get their message across. Between April 1891 and March 1892 over 3000 such lectures were delivered by the members of the Society in London and throughout the country. Between April 1888 and March 1889 there had been 700. Seven of that 700 were to become the *Fabian Essays*.

In 1888 the Lecture Sub-Committee decided upon a series of authoritative presentations on the essence of Fabian socialism. It invited the seven members of the elected Executive each to prepare a one-hour lecture. The first Secretary, Frederick Keddell, had only served for one year (1884–5) before opting exclusively for the Federation: he had been succeeded in the post by Sydney Olivier (1885–1890). E.R. Pease, no longer a member of the Stock Exchange, had gone to live in Newcastle: returning after the *Essays*, he was to be Secretary from 1890 to 1939 (he outlasted every one of the Essayists, dying in 1955 at the age of 98). Hubert Bland, Treasurer from 1884 to 1911, was the only Essayist to have been a founder-member of the Society: the 'Big Four' of early Fabianism had all come in later, Shaw in September 1884, Webb and Olivier in May 1885, Graham Wallas in April 1886. The Fabian Executive in 1884 was made up of Keddell, Pease, Bland, Shaw and Charlotte Wilson. Had the Lecture Sub-Committee turned to the Executive in 1884 and not in 1888, the fortnightly presentations – and the *Fabian Essays* – would clearly have had rather a different slant.

The series of seven lectures was first offered in London, at Wills Rooms, King Street. It excited so much interest that the bulk of the lectures had to be repeated at King's College, Cambridge, and after that in Leicester. Written to be spoken before a generalist audience, the papers were intended to be comprehensible without difficulty even by a non-academic public. The topics had been parcelled out in such a way as to promote an easy complementarity. The speakers had been discussing and shaping each other's ideas for at least three years. All of this led the Fabian Executive to conclude that the lectures ought to be published together as a

book. There was hardly any recent literature on socialism in Britain in the 1880s. There were the writings of William Morris (selections from which are reprinted as Volume III of the present series). There were *England for All* (1881) and *The Historical Basis of Socialism* (1883) by Hyndman and *The Religion of Socialism* (1887) by Bax. *The Communist Manifesto* had appeared in English in 1848 but *The Civil War in France* in 1871 and Edward Aveling's translation of *Capital I* only in 1887. The Fabian lectures if they did nothing else would at least provide a way in to the debate about socialism that existing books seemed inadequate to carry forward. Besides that, the Fabian collection would be a *British* way in. Eschewing Hegelian philosophy in favour of political economy, only occasionally (as in parts of Olivier's paper) substituting obscurity for common sense, seldom dogmatic and never revolutionary, consistently in tune with the moral ideals of a conservative community bearing what Shaw called 'the stamp of the vestry', the collection would be infinitely more in tune with the British temperament than would the long treatises that dealt in determinism and utopia.

The Fabian Executive therefore decided on a book. It invited Shaw to be the editor. Shaw made minor alterations to some of the papers (without, however, eliminating the remaining repetition or persuading Graham Wallas to upgrade what is clearly a sub-standard piece) and he added an additional paper that amplified his own involvement ('The Transition to Social Democracy', which he had just given, on 7 September 1888, to the Economics Section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, meeting in Bristol). He inverted the running order of his paper and Sidney Webb's (Webb had spoken first in the lecture-series) and he contributed a short preface. The Fabian Society (which had never published more than a pamphlet by itself) decided to bring out the *Fabian Essays* on its own. The frontispiece was drawn by Walter Crane, the cover-design by May Morris.

The response was astonishing. Despite the relative youth of the contributors (all but one of them were in their 30s), despite the fact that only Annie Besant was well-known at the time, despite the fact that the Society could not have had much more than a hundred members (the Federation boasted ten times that number), some 1000 copies had been sold in England within a month. By 1891 the figure rose to 25,000, by 1914 to 46,000. An American edition appeared in 1891. Translations followed in Dutch, German, Norwegian and thereafter in other languages. The *Fabian Essays* were reprinted, unaltered, in 1908, 1920, 1931 and 1948. On each occasion a new Preface or Postscript was added: save for the new

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Introduction of 1920 (by Webb), it was Shaw who authored the new sections. The present volume reprints the 1948 edition of the classic work to which Pease in 1916 was obliged to pay the following tribute: 'To the Fabian Essayists belongs the credit of creating the Fabian Society.'

The first four of the eight *Essays* are grouped together under the general heading of 'The Basis of Socialism'. Shaw's chapter – 'Economic' – begins the discussion.

George Bernard Shaw (26 July 1856 – 2 November 1950) was born in Dublin, the son of a corn-miller and businessman. His father, a snob and an alcoholic, was neglectful of his children and not very successful in his work. Shaw's childhood was genteel but deprived.

Shaw was educated at home (by a governess) and then at the Wesley Connexional School. He read widely (the Bible, Bunyan, Scott and Dickens were among his favourites) and taught himself to appreciate art in the National Gallery of Ireland. His ambition was to become a painter, not a writer. He left school at the age of 15 to join a firm of estate-agents as a clerk. At about the same time his mother abandoned his father and went to London to seek employment as a teacher of music. She took her two daughters but not her son, who is likely to have felt rejected and isolated. Shaw was always lacking in the manners he would have learned in a more stable home environment.

Still in his 'teens, Shaw was already writing to newspapers like *Public Opinion*: his first letter was a criticism of 'members of the aristocracy' who attend revivalist meetings suitable only for 'the rough', the 'outcast of the streets'. In 1876, aware that he did not want to be a cashier for life, he decided to make writing his career, and left Dublin to join his mother and (surviving) sister in London. The first years were a period of disappointment and discouragement. He had never been to public school or university; employment was hard to find in the depression of the 1870s; he suffered from smallpox. He wrote five novels between 1878 and 1883: *Immaturity*, *The Irrational Knot*, *Love among the Artists*, *Cashel Byron's Profession* and *An Unsocial Socialist*. Not one of them was accepted by a publisher, English or American. *Immaturity* remained unpublished for all of 50 years. Weak on narrative, it is a surprise that he did not decide in these early years to write plays instead.

Shaw heard Henry George lecture in London in 1882 and became converted to the idea of the nationalisation of land. Shortly thereafter he read Marx's *Capital* (in French) in the British Museum: this led him to conclude that all forms of capital should be nationalised as well. He began

(despite his shyness) to address public gatherings and meetings. By the time he gave his paper to the British Association in 1888 he had become an accomplished orator.

Shaw joined Hyndman's Democratic Federation, Morris's Socialist League and, in the autumn of 1884, the Fabian Society. Within months he had become a member of the Executive. Through the Zetetical Society (its purpose was to discuss the ideas of John Stuart Mill) he made the acquaintance of Sidney Webb. At a meeting of the Land Reform Union he got to know Sydney Olivier. Both joined the Fabian Society in 1885 at Shaw's instigation. It is to the credit of these two senior clerks in the Colonial Office that they perceived that the young Irishman had hidden depths. Shaw at the time was effectively a failed novelist living at home on a small bequest from his mother's grandfather and prone to studying the score of *Tristan und Isolde* in the Round Reading Room. And he was a vegetarian.

William Archer, playwright and dramatic critic, was an early friend with an interest in the theatre: later there were to be Ellen Terry, Harley Granville-Barker, Sir Barry Jackson and Mrs. Patrick Campbell as well. In 1885 Archer persuaded the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* to employ Shaw as a book-reviewer. A year later, in 1886, Archer was instrumental in securing for Shaw an appointment as art-critic on the *World*. From 1888–90 Shaw was the music-critic (writing as Corno di Bassetto) for the *Star*. A Liberal evening-paper, the *Star* could hardly entrust its leadership to an acknowledged socialist. Music, however, was safe. The wisdom of T.P. O'Connor's decision is well illustrated by the highly-readable pieces which were republished much later as *London Music in 1888–9* (1937). It was as a critic and journalist that Shaw was supporting himself when the *Fabian Essays* were published in 1889. Shaw soon thereafter was to begin on the series of 36 plays that were to make his name. In 1889 the 36 plays were all in the future. Archer had tried to enlist Shaw for a collaborative project in which he, Archer, would supply the plot and the lapsed novelist would then embellish it with witty dialogue. The play was abandoned when Archer found that Shaw was making his drama into a socialist comedy about the economic choices of rational landlords in the slums. At the time of the *Fabian Essays* the nearest the lapsed novelist had come to a future in the theatre had been the advice of Archer that he had no future in the theatre at all.

Ibsen's realism and his dramatic idiom were much debated in Britain following the single performance (on 13 March 1891) of his *Ghosts* at the Royalty Theatre under the aegis of the Independent Theatre Society,

founded by J.T. Grein to produce 'plays of literary merit rather than of commercial value'. Shaw's contribution to the debate was *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891). A year later he had himself written a play for Grein and his Society. Essentially a revision of the two acts earlier sketched out with Archer augmented by a new third act on the ethics of investment, *Widowers' Houses* was first staged (it was given two performances only) on 9 December 1892 at the small, fringe Royalty. It appealed to the social conscience and caused a stir at a time when mainstream theatre-going meant *Lady Windemere's Fan*, premiered a few months before.

*Widowers' Houses* was followed in 1893 by *The Philanderer* (a play which no theatre-manager would accept), then *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1894) (denied a public performance until 1925 because of the Lord Chamberlain's objection to the reference to incest), *Arms and the Man* (1894), *Candida* (1895) (performed in South Shields, it only reached London in 1904), *The Man of Destiny* (1896), *You Never Can Tell* (1897) (the production had to be abandoned when several members of the cast complained that the subject-matter was incomprehensible) and *The Devil's Disciple* (1897). Not one of the so-called 'plays unpleasant' that Shaw wrote at great speed in those active five years was put on in a commercial theatre or received more than a few performances. *The Devil's Disciple* was, admittedly, a success in New York. Pleased as he must have been to pocket his £2000 in royalties, Shaw is likely to have suspected that the Americans, mistaking his irony for romance, were treating his comedy of class and attitude as a eulogy of Yankee know-how and pluck. All things considered, Shaw by 1897 was beginning to think that he was as much a failure as a playwright as he had been as a novelist.

Shaw continued throughout the 1890s to be active in the Fabian movement. In 1892 he wrote *The Fabian Election Manifesto* (Fabian Tract No. 40): in it, despairing of the conversion of the Liberals, he recommended the creation of an independent Labour Party. In 1893 there was *The Impossibilities of Anarchism* (Fabian Tract No. 45) that defended the coercive power of the democratic State, no longer an organ of class oppression and purified of the landlords and capitalists who had so frequently frustrated the people's will in the past. Also in 1893 he attended the initial meeting of the Independent Labour Party in Bradford. There, as he reports in the 1948 Postscript to the *Essays*, he found Keir Hardie 'rather at a loss for a programme. I settled one with him in two minutes conversation as we crossed one another on the stairs.' Shaw by 1893 was rapidly losing such faith as he ever had in the wage-earning classes.

Ignorant, easily misled, prejudiced, some workers, Shaw concluded, were becoming 'bourgeois' (his word) while others were falling victim to the aggressive new unionism that knew no ideals. Marx, he decided, had been backing the losing horse: 'The middle and upper classes are the revolutionary element in society; the proletariat is the conservative element.' Keen to get involved but sceptical of Westminster stasis, Shaw (by then the drama-critic of the *Saturday Review*) threw himself into local government, serving between 1897 and 1903 first as vestryman and then as borough councillor for St. Pancras. One result of that experience was his book *The Common Sense of Municipal Trading* (1904).

In 1899 his new play, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, was given its first performance in Newcastle. Mrs. Patrick Campbell played the lead but still it was to be 1907 before this most cerebral and unsentimental of love-stories was put on in the West End. By then, 50 years of age, Shaw had at long last become a popular success. The catalyst for the change had been Harley Granville-Barker who took the risk (as he did with the social dramas of John Galsworthy) of presenting a sequence of Shaw's plays at the Royal Court: *John Bull's Other Island* (1905), *Man and Superman* (1905), *Major Barbara* (1905) and *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906). While *The Doctor's Dilemma* raised highly relevant questions about scarce resources and priorities and *Major Barbara* brought together the armaments industry and the Salvation Army, it was *Man and Superman* in this period that (with or without the massive two-hour disputation that forms the whole of Act III, prudently omitted by Granville-Barker in 1905) was without any doubt the major statement of Shaw's social philosophy at a time when, disillusioned with the working classes, he was striving after perfection through a quasi-Hegelian 'Life Force' (never an atheist, Shaw once characterised his religious faith as 'Christianity without Crosstianity') and an omniscient 'Superman', intelligent and rational, bred to lead. Both *Major Barbara* and *Man and Superman* make much of the 'New Woman'. In many respects she comes across as single-minded and predatory, obsessed with the need for a man in order to accomplish her biological mission. In 1898, aged 42, Shaw had married Charlotte Frances Payne-Townshend. She came from a wealthy background and was, like Shaw himself, of Anglo-Irish extraction. They had no children.

In 1908 there came *Getting Married*, in 1909 *The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet*, in 1910 *Misalliance*, in 1911 *Fanny's First Play*, in 1913 *Androcles and the Lion*. In 1914 *Pygmalion* (already performed in Berlin the year before) was given its first London production at His Majesty's Theatre, Haymarket. Its status as a bittersweet social comedy derives from its

## INTRODUCTION

depiction of equal British citizens trapped without a common core culture. Accent was the metaphor but phonetics was also the sub-plot. Fascinated by language (although not himself a natural linguist) Shaw left money in his will to fund a new British alphabet of at least 40 letters.

In 1908 Shaw published his essay, *The Sanity of Art*. In it he defended the role of the creative artist as an 'immoral' rebel who shakes up the 'customary'. He repeated his defence in the evidence he gave to the Joint Committee on Censorship in the Theatre. By then he was visibly less concerned with class-related issues such as deprivation and individualism. In 1911 he resigned from the Fabian Executive. Perhaps he believed that the entry of the Labour Party into the House of Commons in the election of 1906 had somehow marginalised the midwife who had made it all possible.

Shaw's Fabianism was essentially a thing of the pre-War period. His last major contribution as a Fabian was to be a co-founder of the *New Statesman* in 1913. For it, in November 1914, he wrote a critical supplement, *Common Sense about the War*, which was so unsympathetic to the British position that the Germans cited it in their propaganda. Shaw courted unpopularity through his frequent calls for Britain to be neutral in the First World War. He said he saw a step towards peace in the approaches made by Sir Roger Casement (subsequently executed for treason) and he was capable of advising soldiers on a novel means of bringing the British involvement to a close: 'Shoot your officers and go home.' Shaw, importantly, was not a pacifist. He had in fact been one of the great majority of Fabians who had welcomed British military action against the Boers in the South African War of 1899–1902.

In 1913 Shaw began work on *Heartbreak House*. Nearer to Chekhov than to Ibsen, Shaw's sombre epic of the decline of the 'Dunn', the fall of the 'Shotover' was – the symbolism was no less real for being unintended – first performed in New York, in 1920. It only reached the Royal Court, in London, in October 1921. An elegy to a cherry orchard that had lost its bloom, an evocation of a once-great Britain that was moving into eclipse, Shaw felt that the play was his greatest, 'worth fifty *Candidas*'. It was followed in 1923 by the ambitious *Back to Methuselah*. Spanning the whole of human history from the Garden of Eden to the twentieth century, Shaw's seldom-performed five-act drama (each act the length of a normal evening in the theatre) consolidated his reputation as a playwright of ideas whose work was written to be discussed. In 1924 there came *Saint Joan*, with the young Sybil Thorndike. The play was long and wordy but also well-crafted. Shaw knew that he was being called didactic and, as a

Fabian, rather relished the description. He wrote long prefaces for the published versions of his plays, collecting the prefaces themselves in a separate volume in 1934. Even so, he made sure through an epilogue to *Saint Joan* that the audience knew Joan of Arc had been canonised.

Shaw by the time of *Saint Joan* was the most famous living playwright in the world: only in France was there little interest in his work. He became wealthy, he was offered public honours (which he refused) and in 1925 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Accepting the Prize, he used the money to sponsor translations of Swedish dramatists like Strindberg into English. He continued to write plays. In 1929 there was *The Apple Cart*: in it the good King Magnus is the hero and the democratic process is lampooned as a network of self-seeking incompetents. In 1932 there was *Too True to be Good* (the model for Private Meek was Shaw's friend T.E. Lawrence), in 1938 *Geneva*, in 1939 *In Good King Charles's Golden Days*. These four late plays were first performed at Sir Barry Jackson's annual Malvern Festivals. Shaw's last great play was, however, *Saint Joan*.

Shaw in the late 1920s returned – there had been a gap of almost 40 years – to the economic and political issues that he had addressed so directly in his early Fabian writings. In 1928, in response to his sister-in-law's request for 'a few ideas on socialism', he published *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*. This was followed in 1932 by *The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God* (written in South Africa) and in 1944 by *Everybody's Political What's What*. In 1931 he accompanied the Webbs to the Soviet Union. Like them, he came back full of praise for a well-organised society that had eradicated unemployment, poverty, inequality – and the private ownership of land and capital. Shaw never lost his misgivings about the discordance of democracy. In sympathy with Plato's elitism, quick to demand 'anthropometric methods' to identify natural leaders, able to treat the right to vote as the opportunity to select freely from a pre-filtered panel, it is clear why the dictatorship of the Communist Party could represent to him no insuperable obstacle to the fulfilment of the people's will. Shaw no doubt saw in the intelligence and energy of Stalin much that he admired so greatly in King Magnus, the 'Life Force' and the 'Superman'.

Shaw's contribution to the *Fabian Essays* in 1889 looks forward to much that was to come. Declaring that the economic problem is not nature's niggardliness but the 'advanced stage of rottenness' of capitalist institutions, denying that the verdict of the market can ever be legitimate so long as the distribution of purchasing power is archly unequal, Shaw

attacks surplus rewards not linked to incentive or industriousness and comes down in support of the public ownership of land. Shaw sees competitive capitalism as a mix of 'cupidity' and 'confusion'. He has somewhat less to say about the socialist economy by which he clearly believes it ought to be superseded.

The second of the *Fabian Essays*, entitled 'Historic', was concerned with the historical origins of the socialist system. Its author was Sidney Webb.

Sidney James Webb (13 July 1859 – 13 October 1947) was born in London. His father had a minor accounts practice. Most of the family income came from his mother, a hairdresser and dressmaker.

Sidney was educated at the City of London School. After a short period spent in Switzerland and Germany, he in 1875 became a clerk in a firm of colonial brokers. Ambitious, a voracious reader, much helped by a remarkable memory, he took the competitive examination for the civil service and entered the War Office in 1878, then 19 years of age. In 1879 he was moved to the Surveyor of Taxes' Office and in 1881 to the Colonial Office. In 1885 he was called to the bar at Gray's Inn. In 1886 (having attended evening lectures at the Birkbeck Institute) he obtained his LL.B. from the University of London, with Third Class Honours.

Introduced by Shaw to the Fabian Society, Webb became a member in 1885. A good organiser, a good debater, he almost immediately joined the Executive Committee. Sidney Webb, convinced that socialism would succeed once ordinary intelligent people were exposed to the facts, argued the socialist case in a total of 45 Fabian Tracts. Two of the earliest were his *Facts for Socialists* in 1887 and *Facts for Londoners* in 1889. It was also in 1889 that his contribution to the *Fabian Essays* drew his name to the attention of the non-Fabian public. One consequence was his *Socialism in England*, published in 1890, in which he expressed his own personal vision of the future that had to come: 'On the economic side, Socialism implies the collective administration of Rent and Interest, leaving to the individual only the wages of his labour by hand and brain. On the political side, it involves the collective control over, and ultimate administration of, all the main instruments of wealth production. On the ethical side, it expresses the real recognition of fraternity, the universal obligation of personal service, and the sub-ordination of individual ends to the common good.' Hubert Bland, despairing of permeation, had been calling for an independent Socialist Party. Sidney Webb, in *Socialism in England*, gave voice to the rather different hope that the Liberal Party would make itself the representative of the workers' cause.

The Local Government Act in 1888 had mandated the creation of elected county councils in England and Wales. It had also defined the whole of London to be a single administrative unit. Favourable to decentralisation in any case, Webb recognised that a major opportunity had arisen. In 1891 he resigned from the civil service in order to take part, as a Progressive, in the election for the new London County Council. He was returned in 1892 as the Member for Deptford. He continued to represent the seat until he left the LCC in 1910.

In 1892 Sidney was married to (Martha) Beatrice Potter (1858–1943) and the historic partnership began: 'One and one, when placed in a sufficiently integrated relationship, make not two but eleven', Sidney once said of their unique collaboration. Her background was quite different from his. Her father was a wealthy industrialist; her childhood was spent in the luxury of Standish House, near Gloucester; her education was the result of books, travel and a private governess. Her father's father and her mother's father had both been Liberal Members of Parliament and followers of John Bright. Beatrice had had a formal coming-out and had spent the six years beginning at her eighteenth birthday doing the social circuit.

In 1882 her mother died and she became the manager of her father's houses in London and in the country. She also became his business associate. One of her duties was rent-collecting. This brought her into contact with people from a range of social backgrounds. Her knowledge of the working classes was deepened by the experience she was gaining as a volunteer for the Charity Organisation Society. Herbert Spencer was a frequent visitor to the Potter household. With him she had the opportunity to discuss the socio-political dimensions of poverty, the philosophy of Comte, the status of social investigation.

Her cousin's husband was Charles Booth. She became involved in the empirical research that fed through into the 17 volumes (published between 1891 and 1903) of his *Life and Labour of the People in London*. Some of the information she collected on 'The Dock Life of East London' was published in the *Nineteenth Century* in October 1887. Other articles followed, including one on sweated labour in the tailoring industry which she researched on the shop-floor through taking jobs herself as a 'plain trouserhand'. In 1888 she gave evidence – little had changed, it would appear, since *Cheap Clothes and Nasty* in 1850 – to the House of Lords Committee on the Sweating System. Increasingly of the opinion that poverty was an economic problem, she turned to the cooperative system to discover if it was the much-needed alternative to capitalism and greed.

The results of her research were published in 1891 as *The Co-operative Movement in Great Britain*.

By then she had made the acquaintance of Sidney Webb. Not yet a Fabian, she had nonetheless read the *Fabian Essays* and had formed a positive impression of his theories and beliefs. Beatrice had, not long before, broken off a serious relationship with Joseph Chamberlain, then active in social reform. Marriage with Chamberlain is likely to have condemned her to a lifetime of Victorian subordination. Marriage with Sidney would be more equal. It was probably that equality of status and power combined with the prospect of a considerable joint achievement that was the deciding factor in persuading her to found with Sidney what she later described as 'the firm of Webb'. Tall, elegant and rich where Sidney was short, unattractive and on a civil service salary, she respected him for his intelligence and logic, his accuracy and comprehension. The motto *pro bono publico* was inscribed on their wedding-rings. Their honeymoon was spent studying trade societies in Ireland and attending the Trades Union Congress in Glasgow. The Webbs were austere, ascetic, hard-working, self-righteous. Travel and secretarial assistance seem to have been almost their only luxuries. Children would only have disrupted their routine.

Following their marriage the Webbs threw themselves into joint empirical investigation. The first result of their working compact was *The History of Trade Unionism* (1894). *The Times* called it 'masterly'. Carefully researched, the Webbs were able to draw on their own involvement in the movement to convey through their volume what it meant to be dependant on others for work. The *History* was favourable to the unions and the protection they provided. That protection, the *History* argued, would disappear the moment the unions became a formal part of the managerial structure. The Webbs consistently opposed the syndicalist notion of self-governing cooperative workshops. In contrast to Owen and Fourier in the stage of early industrialisation, to Tom Mann and Ben Tillett in the contentious 1890s, to Pentty and the guild socialists in the run-up to the War, the Webbs took the view that worker-ownership was incompatible with economic efficiency through the detrimental effect it would have on management, marketing and discipline. They therefore argued for the statist alternative of community control, the unions defending the workers, the government providing additional support through the minimum wage. The Webbs returned to the subject of self-help in the two volumes of their *Industrial Democracy* (1897) and in the minority report of the Royal Commission on Labour which Sidney drafted in 1894. In his

contribution to the *Fabian Essays* Sidney had not found much to say about working-class institutions such as trade unions. Beatrice converted him to the cause. In receipt of the solid private income of £1000 a year when she became a Webb, she nonetheless took pride in her family's roots in the Lancashire industrial revolution and in the corporatism of mutual aid.

Active in public service, Sidney on the LCC took an especial interest not in enterprise but in education. He was the Chairman of the Council's Technical Education Board (called Committee after 1903). One of his accomplishments was to secure an LCC grant for the new Polytechnic in Regent Street. He also argued strongly for the uniform, London-wide control of primary schooling. His proposals, set out in 1901 in *The Education Muddle and the Way Out* (Fabian Tract No. 106), anticipate Balfour's reforms of 1903 which made the LCC the sole educational authority for London. At the LCC Webb defended the practice of Council contributions being paid to denominational schools. His reasoning was entirely pragmatic. The public authorities were not in a position to take over and run the schools themselves.

In 1895 the Webbs took the initiative, using money left to Sidney and other trustees by Henry Hutchinson, a Fabian, in establishing a policy-orientated academic institution, the London School of Economics and Political Science. Sidney was the Chairman of the Governors from 1895–1912 and Honorary (unpaid) Professor of Public Administration from 1912–1927. He kept the Society at one remove (the first Director was W.A.S. Hewins, never a socialist) lest fund-raising be put at risk by the Fabian connection. He showed an unexpected deviousness in negotiating a cheap site and a rate exemption. H.G. Wells (who resigned from the Fabian Society in 1908) used the Webbs as the model for the scheming Baileys in *The New Machiavelli* (1911).

In 1898 the Webbs travelled extensively in the Dominions and the United States. They also began their eight-volume history of the functions of local government in England since 1688. The first volume of *English Local Government* was published in 1906, the eighth and last in 1929.

The Independent Labour Party was founded in 1893. The Webbs did not feel that they had much in common with it. ILP members wanted sudden change and proletarian involvement; the Webbs looked to a vanguard of experts for gradual progress towards paternalistic collectivism. The ILP was pacifist and anti-imperialist; the Webbs were aggressively belligerent in the period of the Boer War. Beatrice in addition had a low opinion of ILP leaders such as John Burns and Ramsay MacDonald: she

did not, of course, think much more highly of the Liberals Asquith and Lloyd George. The Webbs were in touch with opinion-leaders in the Conservative Party (most of all Arthur Balfour), the Liberal Party and the civil service. They tended to believe that a research-enlightened consensus and the inevitability of gradualness would somehow carry things along.

Until about 1906 it was Sidney who was involved in public affairs: witness, say, his membership of the Royal Commission appointed in 1908 to reassess trade union legislation in the wake of the Taff Vale decision. In late 1905, however, Balfour made Beatrice a member of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws. The choice was an appropriate one in view of the role she had played in making the public aware of the extent of deprivation and distress. With George Lansbury and others, she was responsible for the minority report (largely drafted by Sidney) that in 1909 recommended the end of the Poor Law. The Fabian Society published (as *The Break-up of the Poor Law*) its own edition of the minority report and ensured that it received extensive distribution. A national agitation against the principle of less-eligibility followed – Beatrice presided over the National Committee for the Prevention of Destitution – but the sought-after Welfare State of old-age pensions, unemployment compensation, upgraded schooling, affordable housing was even so not universally in place until the late 1940s. Lloyd George's National Insurance Bill in 1911 (despite its reliance on the contributory principle) to some extent defused the issue.

The campaign for a national civilised standard published its own newsletter. In 1913 that newsletter, *The Crusade*, became the *New Statesman*, appearing weekly. Sidney was the first Chairman of the Board and Beatrice was a member. In addition to contributing articles, the Webbs wrote longer studies for the series of Supplements that the *New Statesman* was publishing. Among those studies were *Co-operative Production and Profit-sharing* (1914) and *State and Municipal Enterprise* (1915).

The frustration of the crusade against the Poor Laws brought home to the Webbs that the two older parties were not likely to move significantly in the collectivist direction. Despite the increasing militancy of the working class, the Webbs were forced to the conclusion that the Labour Party might be the best channel for change. In 1914 Sidney went on to the War Emergency Workers' National Committee, set up to coordinate working-class activity on the home front. In 1915 he became the Fabian representative on the Labour Party executive: he was to remain a member for 10 years. In 1918, working with Arthur Henderson, he drafted the new Party Constitution – and the controversial Clause IV that committed the Labour

Party to the principle of common ownership. In 1916, in *How to Pay for the War*, and in 1918, in *Labour and the New Social Order*, Sidney had given the Party the arguments that it needed to call itself socialist.

Beatrice at first was not involved. Serving in the War on a government committee inquiring into equal pay for equal work, she spent her time preparing the minority report that was published in 1919 as *The Wages of Men and Women – Should They Be Equal?* She said that they should. Before the war she had shown little interest in women's rights or even in the Suffragist cause. In 1920 she and Sidney published *A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain*. A major *a priori* vision of the ideal socialist polity, it marks their ultimate adoption of the Labour platform as the proper vehicle for their Fabian gradualism. In the *Constitution* the Webbs proposed the creation of two Parliaments – one Social (dealing with economic and cultural issues, supervising the nationalised industries, enjoying the monopoly to tax), the other Political (concerned with the traditional but minimal imperatives of law and order and national defence). Both Parliaments would be elected for a five-year fixed term by direct universal franchise; and there would be no Upper House. In 1918, in his *Reform of the House of Lords* (Fabian Tract No. 183), Sidney Webb had come up with a proposal that did not require the total abolition of the hierarchy of referral: the second House was to be a Committee of Experts, elected by the House of Commons in proportion to the strength of the parties and dissolved when each Commons was dissolved. The proposal shows a lack of trust both in the wisdom of the people and in the hereditary principle that still assigned the right of veto to a House of birth. By 1920 Sidney Webb evidently decided that two parallel Houses, both directly elected, was the best constitutional expedient he was likely to find.

Sidney and Beatrice had both received invitations to stand for Parliament. In 1918 Sidney decided that it would make good sense to agitate from within. He contested the London University seat but was not successful. In 1919, however, he was adopted (as a miner-sponsored candidate) for the constituency of Durham-Seaham, then held by a Liberal. The local Party was attracted by the possibility of a Member who had served on the Royal Commission on the Coal Mines under Mr. Justice Sankey that had just come down in favour of nationalisation: Webb had been one of three experts selected by the Miners' Federation, the other two being R.H. Tawney and Leo Chiozza Money. To show that he was serious about the seat he and Beatrice wrote *The Story of the Durham Miners 1662–1921* (1921) about the workers and the industry underground. In 1922 Sidney entered the House of Commons. In 1924 he was

made the President of the Board of Trade. Within seven years he had had enough. An administrator and a writer but not a politician, he decided not to contest his seat in the election of 1929.

Sidney had hoped to withdraw into scholarship at Passfield Corner, near Liphook, Hampshire. Almost immediately, however, he found himself in Westminster again. Ramsay MacDonald, Labour Prime Minister, persuaded him to accept a hereditary peerage as Baron Passfield (Beatrice refused to be known as Lady Passfield) and, based in the House of Lords, to take on the portfolios of Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs and the Colonies (1929–30), then of Secretary of State for the Colonies (1930–31). Sidney was faced with communal conflict in Palestine and liberation struggles in various parts of the Empire (for which, a leaderly Fabian, he felt little sympathy). His time in politics ended in 1931. He did not join the National Government.

In 1932, both of them over 70, the Webbs spent several months in Russia. The timing of their visit was opportune. Earlier they had had little interest in Shaw's *Supermen* and had entertained high hopes for parliamentary representative democracy. By the 1930s they had become somewhat disillusioned with British Labour, grasping and materialistic. In their book *The Decay of Capitalist Civilisation* (1923) they had enjoined an enlightened Left to 'choose equality and flee greed'. A decade on it was their growing fear that a sybaritical Left was choosing egotism and indulgence instead. Soviet Russia was refreshingly different: inspired by 'the religion of Humanity' and not by the politics of the trough, its citizens had had the good fortune to have come under the wise tutelage of 'a religious order, the Community Party, with its strict disciplines, its vows of obedience and poverty'. Those words were recorded in her Diary even before Beatrice had left for Russia. The Webbs were not oblivious to the persecution of dissidents or to the fact that the Russian Communists had substituted violent revolution for democratic inevitability. On the other hand, they were greatly impressed by the new social order that had put an elite of professionals and experts in charge, that relied proudly on the planners' skills for the conscious direction that was the precondition for equity and development. The Webbs fell in love with Russia and its purposiveness. Their conclusions were set out in the two volumes of their *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* (1935). Meaningfully, they deleted the question-mark from the title when a second edition was published in 1937.

*Soviet Communism* was their last major publication. It had been preceded in the inter-war period by the serious investigations which had appeared as *The Consumers' Co-operative Movement* (1921), *English Poor*

*Law History* (published in three volumes in 1927 and 1929) and *Methods of Social Study* (1932). It had also been preceded by *My Apprenticeship* (1926), in which Beatrice provided a biographical account of her life before her marriage to Sidney. A second volume, *Our Partnership* (published posthumously in 1948), carried the story down to 1911. Her diaries were published in two volumes (in 1952 and 1956), edited by Margaret Cole. The body of work, the contribution to public life, were considerable. Sidney was appointed to the Order of Merit in 1944. He received honorary doctorates from the universities of London, Wales and Munich. Beatrice was made a Fellow of the British Academy in 1931. She received honorary doctorates from Manchester, Edinburgh and Munich.

Sidney's contribution to the *Fabian Essays* dates virtually from the beginning of his career. In it the young reformer criticises competitive individualism for being a cause of poverty, a focus for greediness, and, to a Spencerian organicist, the embodiment of a sociological fallacy: 'A society is something more than an aggregate of so many individual units.' Sidney Webb calls for a new emphasis on 'the higher end, the Common Weal'; recommends the termination of the functionless tribute through the nationalisation of the land; and looks to the municipalities for a constructive lead in respect of public services like gas and social services like libraries. He examines the historical record and identifies in the evolution of political institutions 'the irresistible progress of Democracy'. He concludes that precisely the same historical inevitabilities must ultimately put in place the post-capitalist economy as well: 'The economic side of the democratic ideal is, in fact, Socialism itself.'

The third of the *Fabian Essays* – 'Industrial' – was the work of William Clarke. It continues the theme of the dysfunctional market, the coordinated collectivity.

William Clarke (22 November 1852 – 8 May 1901) was born in Norwich. His father was a warehouseman, later a sales representative. William left school to become a clerk but subsequently enrolled (as a non-collegiate student) to read for the Natural Science Tripos at Cambridge. He transferred to the Historical Tripos. In 1876 he was awarded his B.A. degree, with second class honours.

At university he was active in debating. He also wrote leaders for the *Cambridge Independent* and contributed to other provincial newspapers. A teetotaler, he won a prize in an essay-competition sponsored by *Alliance News*, a temperance review. Leaving Cambridge, he continued his journalism (writing regularly for the *Star*, the *Echo*, and a selection of

monthlies) and kept up his interest in public speaking (lecturing in particular for the National Reform Union and the Liberation Society). In the late 1870s he was a member of the Bedford Chapel Debating Society, in Bloomsbury. So were Shaw and Graham Wallas.

Clarke developed a strong interest in the United States, which he visited for the first time (as a lecturer and journalist) in 1881–2. He became the London correspondent for the *Springfield Republican* and the *Boston Advertiser*, and also contributed to American journals such as the *New England Magazine*. In touch with American opinion, he was attracted by ethical humanists like Emerson and Whitman (so close in many ways to British theorists of social harmony such as Ruskin and Carlyle). He was also influenced by the economic radicalism of Henry Demarest Lloyd, whose 'Making Bread Dear' appeared in the *North American Review* in 1883, 'The Lords of Industry' a year later. These articles (reinforced by his own discussions with Lloyd) led him to look critically at the economic logic of the capitalist system.

Clarke had joined Davidson's Fellowship at its inception in 1883. Increasingly persuaded that moral reformation was an impossibility in the absence of economic and political change, in 1886 he withdrew from the Fellowship and became a member of the Fabian Society. He went on to the Fabian Executive in 1888. Remaining in office only until 1891, those crucial three years were enough to ensure that he was invited to give the lecture that, published in the *Fabian Essays* in 1889, made his name as a radical. In his lecture he had referred explicitly to Marx's *Communist Manifesto*. The references had disappeared by the time of the printed text.

In 1889 Clarke was a delegate to the Second International in Paris, in 1893 to Lloyd's International Labor Congress in Chicago. With Sidney Webb he was made a trustee of the Hutchinson Bequest in 1894. Clarke in consequence became a founder-member of the executive of the newly-created LSE.

In 1897 he resigned from the Fabian Society. In ill-health, increasingly sceptical about the power of ideas, Clarke objected that the Fabian leadership was retreating from ethics in order to concentrate on expediency. By then he had already been exploring alternative avenues. In 1894 Clarke and other moderate pro-Statists had established the Rainbow Circle within the National Liberal Club in order to persuade the Party to jettison its Gladstonian baggage. In 1896 (with Herbert Samuel, J.A. Hobson and other Liberal interventionists) he had founded the *Progressive Review* to argue the case for an involved new Liberalism, up and doing. It collapsed after only a year. One reason for its collapse was the issue of imperialism

that was dividing the Liberals even as it was making it impossible for Clarke to defend the Fabian position.

Clarke since 1890 had been on the staff of the *Daily Chronicle*. The *Chronicle* was close to the Fabian leadership, and for that reason unprepared to criticise the Conservative government at the time of the Boer War. Clarke, who was also writing for the *Spectator*, the *Economist* and the *Manchester Guardian*, resigned from the *Chronicle* in protest in 1899. In 1900 he joined the League against Aggression and Militarism that had been set up by reforming Liberals opposed to the War: J.L. Hammond and Lloyd George were among its members. The anti-imperialist case was soon to be argued with particular eloquence by new Liberals such as Hobson (in his *Imperialism*, 1902) and Hobhouse (in *Democracy and Reaction*, 1904).

Rampant jingoism even among the working classes confirmed to Clarke (more and more apprehensive about the oligarchic tendencies of the mass democracy) that the transition to socialism could no longer be regarded as inevitable. His growing pessimism was heightened by a conviction that the 'workshop of the world' was losing her economic lead to younger competitors like Germany and the United States. Looking to the future, Clarke became convinced that Britain was evolving into a service society, a leisure-centre for the rich and privileged of other nations. Afflicted with diabetes, about to die young, Clarke by the turn of the century was no longer the hopeful idealist who had edited a selection of Mazzini's speeches in 1887 and written *Walt Whitman* in 1892. His intellectual journey is documented in *William Clarke, A Collection of His Writings*, edited by H. Burrows and J.A. Hobson and published in 1908.

Clarke's chapter in the *Fabian Essays*, entitled 'Industrial', shows the influence of Lloyd and Marx more than it does that of Mazzini and Whitman. Surveying the developmental tendencies that have already converted the *laissez-faire* market to regulations and restraining Factory Acts, the author describes free enterprise, 'in our existing economic condition', as 'impossible and absurd'. The concentration of capital, threatening competitiveness through rings and cartels, converting the capitalist into 'an idle dividend-receiver' whose business is operated by a salaried manager, is in itself a harbinger of the inescapable evolution into the coming collectivism of economic planning and labour control: 'Thus we see that capitalism has cancelled its original principle – is itself negating its own existence.' Clarke looks to the State to take over the property-rights and to hire the requisite organisers. He does not look to the trades unions, the cooperative movement or the workers themselves.

The fourth chapter, 'Moral', was the work of Sydney Haldane Olivier (16 April 1859 – 15 February 1943).

Olivier was born at Colchester where his father, a clergyman, was then a curate at All Saints' Church. He was educated at Tonbridge School and then at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. At Oxford his friends included Graham Wallas and Hubert Campion. With Campion he published a volume of verse, *Poems and Parodies*, in 1880. Olivier obtained his B.A. (with second class honours) in *Literae Humaniores* in 1881. Taking the competitive examinations for entry into the civil service, he came top and in 1882 joined the Colonial Office. Initially he worked on public health in the West India Department. Sidney Webb was in the Colonial Office at the same time.

Repelled by individualism and avarice, concerned about poverty and injustice, Olivier early on was attracted by the ideals of the Christian socialists. His friend, Harold Cox, was a member of Hyndman's Democratic Federation: he encouraged Olivier not to neglect the study of the economic basis. Never much convinced by Marx, Olivier attended the meetings of the Hampstead Historic Club (Charlotte Wilson had been the initiator of these influential sessions) at which *Capital* was read and discussed. Henry George made more sense to him. He joined the Land Reform Union in 1883.

In May 1885 he became a member (so did Sidney Webb) of the Fabian Society. Olivier served as Honorary Secretary from 1886 to 1889 and was on the Fabian Executive from 1887 to 1899. He was the author of *Capital and Land* (Fabian Tract No. 7) in 1888 – it appears to have been his only Fabian Tract – and in the same year delivered the lecture that was published as the fourth chapter of the *Fabian Essays* in 1889. He attended the conference of the Labour and Socialist International in Zurich in 1893. Later in the decade he became a member of Clarke's Rainbow Circle. Like Clarke he was opposed to the pro-Empire stance of Shaw, Webb and other Fabians at the time of the Boer War.

Olivier in 1890–91 was the Colonial Secretary of British Honduras. From 1891 to 1895 he was in charge of South African policy at the Colonial Office at a time when speculators and investors (he had strong reservations about the activities of Cecil Rhodes) were opening up the interior. He was the Auditor-General of the Leeward Islands from 1895–6 and the Secretary of the Royal Commission on the West Indies from 1896–7. In 1898 he spent five months in Washington negotiating reciprocity agreements with the United States on behalf of the Caribbean colonies. From 1900 to 1904 he was Colonial Secretary of Jamaica, from 1907 to

1913 its Captain-General and Governor-in-Chief. A lifelong socialist and a Fabian, one of his reforms was a comprehensive sanitary code and another was an extension of educational opportunities. In Jamaica he walked to work and gave public lectures on the inevitability of socialism.

In 1913 he returned to England to become Permanent Secretary at the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries. He entered the Treasury in 1917 as Assistant Comptroller and Auditor of the Exchequer. He retired from the civil service in 1920, aged 61.

In 1924 Olivier was invited to join the first Labour Government, then being formed by Ramsay MacDonald. He became Secretary of State for India and was made a hereditary baron. As he and his wife had four daughters but no son, the title of Lord Olivier died with him and could later be revived as a life peerage for his nephew, the actor. Sydney, the Government falling within the year, had in the event little impact on India or on the home rule controversy. In 1929–30, as the Chairman of the West India Sugar Commission, he made his last official visit to Jamaica. The recommendations of the Commission were rejected by the Colonial Secretary – Sidney Webb. This led Olivier to criticise the second Labour Government from his position in the House of Lords.

A prolific author, Olivier wrote articles and reviews on topics as wide-ranging as Mill, Tolstoy, anarchism, Morris, Africa, India and the restoration of Stonehenge. Some of his occasional pieces are reprinted in *Sydney Olivier: Letters and Selected Writings* (1948), edited by his widow, Margaret. He wrote plays such as *Mrs. Maxwell's Marriage* (1900) and fiction such as *The Empire Builder* (1905). Shocked by the divisiveness of race and colour, he wrote two books on the political economy of colonial conditions: *White Capital and Coloured Labour* (1906) and *The Anatomy of African Misery* (1927). Colonial history was explored in *The Myth of Governor Eyre* (1933). His last book, *Jamaica: The Blessed Island* (1936) was his tribute to the colony where he had spent so many years. In 1911 he was awarded an honorary LL.D. from the University of Edinburgh.

Olivier's contribution to the *Fabian Essays* has the character of a reminder to the economists and the determinists that 'the moral ideas appropriate to Socialism are permeating the whole of modern society', that it is ethics as well as interests that is the guarantor of democratic socialism. Being specific, Olivier homes in on the intolerable immorality of an idle plutocracy that can retreat from toil into partridge – shooting because the industrious are expected to generate a subsidy in the form of interest and rent. Being general, Olivier makes clear that his standard of right and wrong is no more absolute, no less functionalist, than the original imperative 'to

preserve the existence of society and the cohesion and convenience of its members'. There is, one suspects, more of Comte's sociology than of Christian socialism in Olivier's Fabian Essay on the moral basis.

The fifth and sixth of the *Fabian Essays* constitute a second section. Following on from 'The Basis of Socialism', that section is headed 'The Organization of Society'. The subject of the fifth of the *Essays* is 'Property under Socialism'. Its author is Graham Wallas.

Graham Wallas (31 May 1858 – 9 August 1932) was born at Monkwearmouth and brought up in Barnstaple. His father, Evangelical, Liberal, was a clergyman. Graham was taught at an early age that good and bad were not subject to supply and demand. Later, losing his religious faith, he was to become a rationalist, inspired by Darwin and Mill. Even so, he was never to lose his commitment to duty and responsibility as a way of life. Laski described him as 'a bishop *manqué*'.

Wallas attended Shrewsbury School and (on an open scholarship) Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He obtained a B.A. in Classical Moderations (with second class honours) in 1879 and another, in *Literae Humaniores*, in 1881. His contemporary was Sydney Olivier. Both the sons of the vicarage, both educated (unlike any of their associates in the *Fabian Essays*) at public school, both drawn to history and ancient philosophy at Oxford, they shared a common background and outlook.

From 1881 to 1884 Wallas taught classics at a preparatory school near Maidenhead. In 1884 he was appointed as a classics master at Highgate School. A year later he resigned rather than take communion, regarded at Highgate as a part of his duties. He spent the winter of 1885–6 in Germany. Studying philosophy, living on money from his father, he sought to make some sense of the way in which he had become radical, secular, republican and egalitarian under the influence of an ethically-informed Benthamism and the Greek ideal of the humane community – the 'good society' that was to become his 'Great Society', his supreme goal.

Wallas in Germany came into contact with a socialist movement that was considerably more advanced than its English counterpart. In 1886, returning to England, he joined the Fabian Society. Introduced by his friend Olivier, he was the last of the 'Big Four' to become active in the Society that they were effectively to shape and dominate for a decade. Wallas became the first chairman of the Fabian Parliamentary League, established in 1887 to make Fabianism into a *political* campaign. In 1888 he became the first chairman of its more powerful successor, the Political Committee of the Fabian Society. Wallas had lived in Germany at a time