

LETTER OF FRIEDRICH ENGELS¹ TO EDUARD BERNSTEIN²

Engels freely gave advice and news to socialist leaders round the world. Here is his view of the foundation of the Socialist League.

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| <p>London, 29 December 1884</p> | <p>60- Furthermore, Hyndman had told several people</p> |
| <p>Dear Ede,³</p> | <p>that a somewhat mysterious letter to the</p> |
| <p>From Kautsky⁴ I learn that you have lost not only your sister but also your father. Let me assure you of my warmest sympathy. It is one of the more sombre aspects of exile which I, too, have come to know. The fatherland as such is something one can easily dispense with, but</p> | <p>65- the actual letter from the Council. Finally, in addition to having repeatedly stirred up strife between members of the Council, he was shown to have fabricated a provincial branch which did not exist at all.</p> |
| <p>— Now for events over here. On Saturday the Social Democratic Federation⁵ happily disintegrated. The bubble burst somewhat sooner than I had expected, but it was bound to come.</p> | <p>70- In short, last Tuesday things came to a head. Hyndman was attacked from every side, Scheu himself was there, documents in hand. Tussy had a letter from her sister about the alleged forgery. There was a row. Meeting adjourned till Saturday. Morris and Aveling¹⁹</p> |
| <p>15- Hyndman, a political adventurer with aspirations to a <i>carrière</i> in Parliament, had long since gained control of the whole business. When, a year ago, Bax⁶ launched <i>To-Day</i>⁷, there was not enough literary talent to keep the little affair going, let alone a weekly, but a weekly Hyndman must needs have. Hence <i>Justice</i>⁸ was founded with money given by two enthusiasts, Morris and Carpenter⁹, it was edited by Hyndman with the aid of a few young literati who were on the look-out for some new movement capable of paying them (Fitzgerald¹⁰ and Champion¹¹) and one Joynes¹², a teacher dismissed from Eton for agitation conducted in company with Henry George¹³, and hence a socialist, willy-nilly. These men were paid, directly or indirectly — Hyndman is rich but tight-fisted — , the rest had to contribute gratis. All the Federation's papers went to Hyndman, Fitzgerald and Champion, who placed before the Council only what they thought fit, and corresponded off their own bat in the Federation's name; in short, Hyndman treated the Council as Bismarck¹⁴ treats the Reichstag.¹⁵ Loud complaints; they even reached me. I said: 'Give the man his head. He's a petty-minded chap and won't last long, for he cannot wait.' And he has come a cropper sooner than I thought he would.</p> | <p>75- came to see me beforehand, when I was able to give them some further advice. Big debate on the Saturday. None of the facts could be denied, either by Hyndman or by the 80- supporters he had drummed up. Motion of censure on Hyndman adopted. Whereupon the majority resigned from the Federation. The grounds for this were, 1) that at a congress, Hyndman might fabricate a majority with the aid of his bogus branch, while they would be unable to prove the non-existence of that branch, or at any rate not until it was too late, 2) — and this was the main reason — because the entire Federation was, after all, no better 90- than a racket.</p> |
| <p>45- Morris, who was in Scotland a fortnight ago, uncovered there such intrigues on Hyndman's part that he said he could no longer continue to work with the fellow. He had long had his suspicions. An interview with Andreas Scheu¹⁶ in Edinburgh brought matters to a head. Hyndman had defamed Scheu by calling him an anarchist and dynamiter — Scheu was able to provide Morris not only with proof to the contrary, but also of the fact that Hyndman knew this. Similar machinations of Hyndman's 55- in Glasgow, where the branch had received letters from the secretary, Fitzgerald, bearing the Federation's stamp but which had not only not been written at the behest of the Council, but actually in defiance of its resolutions.</p> | <p>95- Those who resigned were Aveling, Bax and Morris, the only honest ones amongst the literati, but also three as unpractical men — two poets and a philosopher²⁰ — as it is possible to find. Also, the cream of the better- known working men. They intend to do the rounds of the London branches in the hope of winning over the majority, whereupon they will let Hyndman and his non-existent provincial 100- branches go whistle. Their organ is to be a little monthly. At last they are going to operate modestly and in accordance with their powers, and not go on pretending that the English proletariat must instantly jump to it the moment the trumpet is sounded by a few literary converts to socialism. (In London, according to Morris' admission, they were 400 strong at the outside and barely 100 in the provinces.) The circulation of <i>Justice</i> is about 110 3,500. Hyndman is retaining <i>Justice</i> and <i>To-Day</i>, together with his speculative literati Fitzgerald, Champion, Burrows,²¹ Shaw²² and possibly also Sketchley²³ who, as a former Chartist,²⁴ 115 presumably considers himself entitled to a pension. Add to that what remains of the old democratic or socialist sects. Whose prize the other remnants of the Federation will be,</p> |

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120 remains to be seen. But since Hyndman will no
longer be getting any money either from Morris
or from Carpenter for his unprofitable organs,
he will either have to pay up himself, or sell
125 himself, his organs and the remnants of his
faction to the Christian Socialists²⁵ or — to
Lord Randolph Churchill and Tory Democracy.²⁶
He'll have to look sharp if he wants to stand for
Parliament in the elections next autumn.

130 I have the satisfaction of having seen
through the whole racket from the outset,
correctly sized up all the people concerned and
foretold what the end would be, and similarly
that the said racket would eventually do more
harm than good.
135 Your
F. E.

29 December 1884. In vol. 47 of Marx-Engels Collected Works, first published in Russian, in Marx-Engels Archives, Book I, Moscow, 1924. See http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/letters/84_12_29.htm Notes by F. Poirier.

1. Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), the closest friend and collaborator of Karl Marx (1818-1883), he remained an avuncular figure for the Marx family and the voice of legitimacy for anybody claiming to follow Marx's ideas.
2. Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932), German socialist theoretician and political leader, would later, from about 1889, move to a "reformist" attitude.
3. Nickname of E. Bernstein for close friends.
4. Karl Kautsky (1854-1938), Austrian socialist theoretician and political leader, became the political secretary of Engels in 1881, supplemented by his wife Louise, a few years later, when he moved the seat of his socialist newspaper to Stuttgart. Kautsky campaigned against Bernstein "revisionism", but was himself to be denounced as a "renegade" by Lenin when he refused to support the Bolshevik experience in Russia.
5. Founded by Henry Mayers Hyndman (1842-1921) as the Democratic Federation, it became the Social Democratic Federation in 1884. In December of that year, the majority of the executive seceded to form the Socialist League, as told in this letter.
6. Ernest Belfort Bax (1854-1918), a friend and political collaborator of William Morris.
7. This periodical had by now been taken over by Hyndman and his friends.
8. The official weekly of the SDF.
9. Edward Carpenter (1844-1929) was the son of a naval officer. A graduate of Trinity, Cambridge, he became a curate in the church whose principal minister was Frederick Maurice (1805-1872), the founder of the Christian Socialist movement, but he left the Church in 1874. In 1882, he inherited a considerable sum of money and soon joined the SDF. He followed Morris, whom he greatly admired, into the Socialist League and built a reputation of his own as a writer of political essays (*England's Ideal*, 1885) and songs and hymns for the Socialist cause (*England Arise!*). In 1893, he joined the Independent Labour Party.
10. The Secretary of the SDF. See *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier*.
11. Henry Hyde Champion (1859-1928), was the editor of *Justice*. He was later expelled from the SDF, edited *The Labour Elector* in 1888 with Tom Mann and John Burns, contributed to Annie Besant's *The Link*, played a leading role in the 1889 London dock strike. He then joined first the Fabian Society, and later the Independent Labour Party. He emigrated to Australia in 1894. In 1884, it had been discovered that he and Hyndman had accepted money from the Conservative party so as to help them run SDF candidates who would split the Liberal vote.
12. J.L. Joynes. See Bellamy *et al*.
13. Henry George (1839-1897), American reformer, was the author of *Progress and Poverty* (1881) in which he advocated land taxation. He toured Europe to propagate his ideas and Engels considered his muddled and confused theory as a first step within the American context, but quite unacceptable within the European one. His ideas were quite popular, though, in Scotland and Ireland.
14. Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898), Prussian premier from 1862 under William I, he was the architect of German unity (at the cost, *inter alia*, of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870). Having become the Chancellor of the new *Reich*, he implemented with an iron hand an authoritarian policy and waged a ruthless battle against the rise of socialist ideas with a carrot and stick policy, i.e. advanced social reforms and merciless repression of all social movements. He had to leave power shortly after William II's accession (1890).
15. The *Reich's* parliament.
16. Andreas Scheu (1844-1927), a leading Austrian socialist, had been a member of the First international. He emigrated to England in 1874 and was a founder-member of Hyndman's SDF. He joined in the foundation of the Socialist League.
17. Laura (1845-1911), the second daughter of Karl Marx, married to French socialist Paul Lafargue (1842-1911).
18. Tussy was the nickname of Eleanor Marx within her family and circle of close friends. Eleanor (1855-1898) was the youngest daughter of Karl Marx (1818-1883), and "common law wife" of English socialist, darwinist and atheist Dr. Edward Aveling (1849-1898).
19. See previous note.
20. Poets: Morris and Carpenter. Philosopher: Bax.
21. Herbert Burrows (1845-1921). A founder-member of the SDF, he was a friend of Annie Besant's, whom he had met in 1879. He was active in supporting her during the match-girls' strike (1888) and during the London dock strike (1889). Together with Besant, he turned to theosophy.
22. George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), the famous essayist and playwright and friend of William Morris's, though he was to turn to the very sedate, intellectual and reformist Fabian Society, which he helped to form in 1884.
23. John Sketchley. See Bellamy *et al*.
24. From 1837 to 1854, widespread working-class and radical agitation in favour of manhood suffrage led to rioting and impressive demonstrations in support of the petition for "the People's Charter". In the course of this agitation, a number of socialist ideas made their way. The movement was met by successive governments with severe suppression and reform of the worst type of social abuse. It was hailed by Marx and Engels as the first national independent movement of the working-class, and some of this experience is the inspiration of a number of passages in the 1848 *Communist Manifesto*. See <http://www.univ-paris13.fr/CRIDAF/CRIDAF-10reponses.htm>
25. A group of people who followed Frederick Maurice (see above) and Charles Kingsley (1819-1875), and who promoted a number of social reforms in the interest of working people, in the name of god and social harmony.
26. Lord Randolph Churchill (1849-1895), tried to convert Conservatism into a popular movement united by the slogan of "Tory democracy". He rose to become Chancellor of the Exchequer (1886) when disagreements within the cabinet forced him to resign. He was the father of Winston Churchill.