

## Journal of American Studies

<http://journals.cambridge.org/AMS>

Additional services for *Journal of American Studies*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



---

## American Progressives and the European Left

Melvyn Stokes

Journal of American Studies / Volume 17 / Issue 01 / April 1983, pp 5 - 28  
DOI: 10.1017/S002187580001450X, Published online: 16 January 2009

**Link to this article:** [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S002187580001450X](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S002187580001450X)

### How to cite this article:

Melvyn Stokes (1983). American Progressives and the European Left. *Journal of American Studies*, 17, pp 5-28 doi:10.1017/S002187580001450X

**Request Permissions :** [Click here](#)

# American Progressives and the European Left

MELVYN STOKES

Until comparatively recently, historians treated progressivism of the early twentieth century variety as if it were a purely American affair. In 1952, Eric F. Goldman argued that progressivism was 'as exclusively national a movement as the United States ever knew'.<sup>1</sup> But in the years that followed, a number of works appeared which challenged the validity of this narrowly national interpretation. Arthur Mann, in 1956, suggested that American reformers were much influenced by British social thought. Gertrude Almy Slichter drew attention to the European background of American reform in a 1960 dissertation.<sup>2</sup> A number of essays then showed that progressivism itself could be regarded as part of an international movement. Peter F. Clarke pointed out that there had been a progressive movement in England which, in fact, predated the American equivalent. Kenneth O. Morgan, reviewing the nature of the links between British and American reformers, thought it meaningful to write in terms of 'Anglo-American Progressivism'.<sup>3</sup> Other historians, looking at the matter in a more general, European context, were struck by the apparent similarities between American progressives, British Liberals or Labourites, and French and German socialists. George E. Mowry argued that American progressives should be regarded as part of western 'social democracy'. Arthur A. Ekirch came to much the same conclusion. 'In terms of

Melvyn Stokes is Lecturer in American History in the Department of History, University College London, Gower St., London WC1E 6BT.

<sup>1</sup> Eric F. Goldman, *Rendezvous with Destiny, A History of Modern American Reform* (New York, 1952), p. 261.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Mann, 'British Social Thought and American Reformers of the Progressive Era', *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 42 (March 1956), pp. 672-92; Gertrude Almy Slichter, 'European Backgrounds of American Reform, 1880-1915', University of Illinois Ph.D. thesis, 1960.

<sup>3</sup> Peter F. Clarke, 'The Progressive Movement in England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, 24 (London, 1974), p. 160; Kenneth O. Morgan, 'The Future at Work: Anglo-American Progressivism 1890-1917', in H. C. Allen and Roger Thompson, eds., *Contrast and Connection, Bicentennial Essays in Anglo-American History* (London, 1976), pp. 245-271.

*Amer. Stud.* 17, 1, 5-28 Printed in Great Britain

ideology and intellectual history', he declared, 'one may conclude that no rigid walls separated the concepts of Progressivism in the United States and social democracy or state socialism in Europe.'<sup>4</sup>

While it is clear that progressivism was much more than an American domestic phenomenon, Mowry and Ekirch may have exaggerated the extent of its likeness to European movements. Real differences existed between American and European reform. Treating them as belonging to a generalized tradition of 'social democracy' only blurs those differences, it does not eliminate them. This becomes still more evident if the term 'social democracy' is used in its more customary, later nineteenth century usage, as a description of the ideas of continental European socialists. It would be absurd to suggest that American progressives were the same as German Social Democrats, with their Marxist orientation and working-class political base. To do so would be to ignore the criticisms of Social Democracy voiced by those progressives who were most familiar with the subject. Plainly, American progressives felt more at home with some European reformers and social movements than with others. The extent to which the progressives may genuinely be regarded as part of a broader, international movement, therefore, depends on the precise nature of the relationships that existed between them and European liberals, radicals and socialists. This essay examines the nature of the ties that bound American progressives to the European left. By focussing on a group of important publicists of progressive reform (Jane Addams, Ray Stannard Baker, Charles A. Beard, Richard T. Ely, Washington Gladden, G. Stanley Hall, Frederic C. Howe, Walter Rauschenbusch, Edward A. Ross, Albert Shaw, Lincoln Steffens, Ida M. Tarbell and William Allen White), it also seeks to depict the progressives' attitude towards European social movements.

## I

As was perhaps to be expected, the strongest ties to develop were those with British reformers. There was a historical precedent for this: reformers of the early nineteenth century had often regarded themselves as members of the same transatlantic crusade. The movements for peace, temperance and women's rights were all, to a large extent, 'Anglo-American ventures'.<sup>5</sup> The abolitionist movement also saw a good deal of co-operation of this

<sup>4</sup> George E. Mowry, 'Social Democracy, 1900-1918', in C. Vann Woodward, ed., *The Comparative Approach to American History* (New York and London, 1968), pp. 271-84; Arthur A. Ekirch, Jr., *Progressivism in America, A Study of the Era from Theodore Roosevelt to Woodrow Wilson* (New York, 1974), p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Christine Bolt, *The Anti-Slavery Movement and Reconstruction, A Study in Anglo-American Co-operation 1833-1877* (London, 1969), p. 84.

kind. American abolitionists lectured in Britain and their British counterparts travelled widely in the United States. But, in retrospect, it can be seen that the world anti-slavery conference of 1840 was 'the highpoint of co-operation between the two nations'.<sup>6</sup> Thereafter, splits within the American movement itself and the growing conviction that the abolitionist struggle had now become almost exclusively an American affair tended to limit the possibilities of co-operation. The Civil War, when it came, heightened American self-absorption and made British abolitionists both critical and wary over Northern slowness in decreeing the emancipation of the slaves. The gulf between British and American abolitionists that had grown up was only partly bridged after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation had been issued. British abolitionists put a good deal of energy into efforts to help the liberated slaves through freedmen's aid societies, but even these last vestiges of co-operation had lapsed by the end of 1868.<sup>7</sup> It took new men and new circumstances to recreate the intimate transatlantic reform community of ante-bellum days.

James Bryce, then Professor of Law at Oxford and a frequent visitor to the United States, played a prominent role in the renewal of Anglo-American reform ties. Albert Shaw, the future progressive editor and urban reformer, first met Bryce when the Englishman came to Baltimore in 1882. In common with a number of other graduate students at Johns Hopkins University, Shaw was invited to write a special paper in connection with the preliminary inquiries Bryce was then making for what would become his classic work *The American Commonwealth* (1888). Shaw's own essay, on the institutional background to local government in the states of the American west, 'was well enough regarded to be sent to England, where Bryce turned it over to John Morley who published it in his "Fortnightly Review"'. Thus began Shaw's links with 'those eminent British Liberals, whose friendship I enjoyed throughout the remainder of their lives'.<sup>8</sup> When he arrived in England in 1888 to study municipal government, he did so under the auspices of Bryce and Sir Percy Bunting, editor of the *Contemporary Review*, which had published another of his articles a year earlier.<sup>9</sup> Shaw went to Bryce's home several times for dinner,

<sup>6</sup> Howard Temperley, *British Antislavery 1833-1870* (London, 1972), p. 195; Bolt, *Anti-Slavery Movement*, p. 24. The quotation is from Bolt.

<sup>7</sup> Bolt, pp. 31, 108-09.

<sup>8</sup> Shaw, 'Recollections of President Gilman', typescript marked Windsor Park, Florida, 10 June 1943, pp. 8-9, Gilman Papers, Johns Hopkins University Library. Shaw's article was published as 'Local Government in America', *Fortnightly Review*, n.s., 32 (October 1882), pp. 485-95.

<sup>9</sup> Shaw, 'William T. Stead', *Review of Reviews*, 45 (1912), p. 691; Shaw, 'The American State and the American Man', *Contemporary Review*, 51 (May 1887), pp. 695-712.

met such figures as Gladstone and Lord Acton, and ‘in general received entrée to the British Liberal Establishment’. It was through Bryce that Shaw for the first time met William T. Stead, then the highly successful editor of the crusading *Pall Mall Gazette*.<sup>10</sup> Stead, like Bryce, saw himself as something of an Anglo-American reformer. Unlike Bryce, who confined himself to scholarship and inspiring young Americans like Shaw and later Frederic Howe with the conviction that reform was desirable,<sup>11</sup> Stead became directly involved. When a newspaper he tried to establish failed in 1893, he crossed to the United States and launched the assault on corruption and immorality in Chicago that culminated in the publication of his famous book, *If Christ Came to Chicago* (1894).<sup>12</sup>

For all his eccentricities, Stead was an important figure in the world of British reform. He had been very effective, during the 1880s, in promoting public awareness of social problems. It was Stead, for example, who first made the condition of the poor in the East End of London a burning issue. It had long been a matter of concern to a small minority of clergymen and socially-conscious members of the middle-class. Edward Denison, the philanthropist, had lived in the East End for a time in the late 1860s. Walter Besant wrote about the plight of the London poor in his novel *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, published in 1882. But none of their efforts had managed to attract very much public attention. It was entirely possible for Jane Addams to visit the East End, and be appalled by the poverty of its inhabitants, without at the same time gaining any idea that there were already ‘hundreds of men and women who had gallantly identified their fortunes with these empty-handed people, and who, in church and chapel, “relief works”, and charities, were at least making an effort towards its mitigation’. This situation began to change on 16 October 1883, when Stead printed a synopsis of the Reverend Andrew Mearns’ pamphlet, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* in the *Pall Mall Gazette*.<sup>13</sup> By giving publicity

<sup>10</sup> Lloyd J. Graybar, *Albert Shaw of the Review of Reviews, An Intellectual Biography* (Lexington, Ky., 1974), p. 40. Stead, who founded the British *Review of Reviews* in 1890, and served as its first editor, was destined to be a figure of no small significance in Shaw’s life. It was at his suggestion that Shaw, in 1891, became the editor of the American version of *Review of Reviews*.

<sup>11</sup> For Bryce’s influence upon Howe, see Frederic C. Howe, *The Confessions of a Reformer* (New York, 1925), pp. 3, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Ray Stannard Baker, who covered Stead’s Chicago campaign for his newspaper, claimed to have learned from him ‘a number of things, some to commend, some to avoid, that were of value to me in the years so soon to come, when I was to play a part in developing the so-called “literature of exposure”’. Baker, *American Chronicle, The Autobiography of Ray Stannard Baker* (New York, 1945), p. 31.

<sup>13</sup> Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House, With Autobiographical Notes* (New York, 1910), p. 69. Although Addams’ visit to the East End was on 26 October 1883, ten days after the synopsis was published, she seems to have been unaware at that stage

to Mearns' ideas in the pages of a mass-circulation newspaper, Stead helped provoke a whole new interest in the fate of the poor and deprived. *The Bitter Cry* acted as a catalyst to the thinking of Samuel A. Barnett and a group of young Oxford men: in 1884 they founded Toynbee Hall, a settlement in the East End which was intended to provide a means by which men of wealth and education could 'elevate' the poor by living amongst them.<sup>14</sup> In 1886, Charles Booth began his monumental *Life and Labour of the People of London*, which would validate many of Mearns' claims.<sup>15</sup> In 1887, the People's Palace opened its doors to provide meeting rooms and workshops for the use of the working-class of the East End. By the time of Jane Addams' next visit to London, less than five years later, there was irrefutable evidence of a whole new consciousness of the plight of the poor together with a manifest determination to do something about it. A good deal of the credit for achieving this must go to Stead.

American progressives, conscious of the widening gulf that separated rich and poor in their own cities, were particularly interested in the British settlement house movement. 'This afternoon at 4', Washington Gladden noted on 17 June 1888, 'we went to St Philip's Church on Regent St [London] and heard Mr Barnett, who is the head of Toynbee Hall, give a lecture on the work of that Institution. It was a most interesting statement, – exactly what we wanted to hear. We saw Mr Barnett afterward, and are going out there again this week.' Gladden, Albert Shaw and Jane Addams all visited Toynbee Hall for the first time in 1888.<sup>16</sup> In

either of Mearns' pamphlet or the publicity Stead had given it. She only states rather vaguely in her autobiography that 'the *Pall Mall Gazette* exposure started "The Bitter Cry of Outcast London"' controversy in the same year as her visit. See Addams, *Extracts and Summary of Notebooks – First Trip to Europe* (22 August to 1 November 1883), Jane Addams Papers, Swarthmore College Peace Collection; Addams, *Twenty Years*, p. 69.

<sup>14</sup> Anthony S. Wohl, *The Eternal Slum, Housing and Social Policy in Victorian London* (London, 1977), pp. 215–16.

<sup>15</sup> Although none of the American progressives seems to have met Booth personally, his work – and that of Seeböhm Rowntree in York – was well known to them. See Jane Addams, *Newer Ideals of Peace* (New York, 1907), pp. 86–87; Richard T. Ely to H. W. Desmond, 22 Dec. 1904, Richard T. Ely Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin; Frederic C. Howe, *The British City, The Beginnings of Democracy* (New York, 1907), p. 310; booklist in folder marked 'The Social Question – Social Evolution – Political Economy', Walter Rauschenbusch Papers, American Baptist Historical Society, Rochester, New York; Albert Shaw, 'London Polytechnics and People's Palaces', *The Century Magazine*, n.s., 18 (June 1890), pp. 172–73.

<sup>16</sup> Washington Gladden to Children, 17 June 1888, roll 2, frames 0448–0449, microfilm edition, Washington Gladden Papers, Ohio State Historical Society; Albert Shaw, interview with the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 24 and 27 Nov. 1888, as reprinted in *Notes, 1889–1890*, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science (Baltimore, 1890), pp. 1, 3, 8; Addams, *Twenty Years*, p. 87.

Miss Addams' case, of course, the experience helped convince her that she should open a settlement of her own in the Chicago slums. Settlement house workers on both sides of the Atlantic were very conscious of belonging to the same movement, and the settlements themselves played a valuable role in promoting international links between reformers. After Hull House opened its doors in the fall of 1889, the Chicago settlement soon became the magnet for visiting British reformers that Toynbee Hall was for eastward-bound Americans. Its guest-book, over the years, read like a directory of the British left. Samuel Barnett was a guest in 1891, when he opened the new art gallery. Stead visited frequently during 1893. Labour leaders and socialists often called: Keir Hardie in 1895, Ramsay MacDonald in 1897, and John Burns twice, with a thirteen-year gap in between. Sidney and Beatrice Webb were there in 1898 – an experience that inevitably found its way into Beatrice's diary. For her, it seems to have been something of an ordeal. She took an instant liking to Jane Addams ('a remarkable woman'), but left Halsted Street with little of the affection that visiting Americans were wont to lavish on Toynbee Hall, declaring that the

days of our stay at Hull House are so associated in my memory with sore throat and fever, with the dull heat of the slum, the unappetising food of the restaurant, the restless movements of the residents from room to room, the rides over impossible streets littered with unspeakable garbage, that they seem like one long bad dream lightened now and again by Miss Addams' charming grey eyes and gentle voice and graphic power of expression.<sup>17</sup>

The settlement house movement in England, to a far greater extent than in the United States, was affected by religious influences. Its leaders were dedicated to the task of making Christianity more relevant to the solution of social problems. Americans who were interested in the settlements, therefore, also found themselves being introduced to men who were pioneering a new, liberal theology. Samuel Barnett, the founder of Toynbee Hall, was an Anglican minister. When Jane Addams arrived at Toynbee Hall for the first time, she was carrying a letter of introduction from Canon W. H. Fremantle, Barnett's 'close friend, adviser, and former pastor', whom she had met at a tea party in Canterbury. It may well be that it was at Fremantle's suggestion that Washington Gladden, a few days after Miss Addams, made his own first contact with Barnett and the world

<sup>17</sup> David A. Shannon, ed., *Beatrice Webb's American Diary 1898* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1963), pp. 108–09. See *ibid.*, pp. 10–11, for Mrs Webb's meeting with Albert Shaw while she was in New York on the same visit.

of Toynbee Hall.<sup>18</sup> In his Bampton Lectures, *The World as the Object of Redemption*, Fremantle had provided a theological justification for what Barnett was trying to do, arguing that religion should concern itself with the salvation of society rather than the individual. It was no coincidence that Jane Addams, having agonized for years over her religion, joined the Presbyterian Church only four months after meeting Fremantle and Barnett. They introduced her to a religion of social action that quieted her doctrinal doubts. Another progressive much influenced by the teaching of men like Fremantle was Richard Ely: when *The World as the Object of Redemption* was published in an American edition in 1895, it appeared with an introduction by Ely. A far more convinced Christian than Miss Addams, Ely had long cherished links with English Christian Socialists. He had met Thomas Hughes when the latter visited the United States in 1883, and thereafter corresponded regularly with Hughes and other prominent British Christian Socialists. 'Ely,' in the view of his biographer, 'perhaps more than any other American, popularized the ideas of the movement in the United States.'<sup>19</sup>

British social and religious movements which sought to solve the problems of the industrial city found a political focus in 1889, with the establishment of the London County Council. The efforts of London's new leaders to improve the condition of their city soon caught the imagination of reformers on both sides of the Atlantic. 'Of the varied groups and individuals whose suggestions remained with me for years', Jane Addams later wrote of her third visit to England in 1896, 'I recall perhaps as foremost those members of the new London County Council whose far-reaching plans for the betterment of London could not but enkindle enthusiasm.'<sup>20</sup> American progressives like Addams owed a good deal to the British reformers on the L.C.C. – including, most probably, their name. The seventy men who formed the first L.C.C. preferred to be known not as Liberals, which most of them were, but as Progressives. The change of label made electoral sense in predominantly Conservative London. But it also made it possible for non-Liberal left-wingers to secure election to the Council. The first of these was John Burns, working-class socialist and union leader, who was returned by Battersea voters in 1889. At the next election, three years later, Burns was joined on the Council by eight other

<sup>18</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, p. 87; Allen F. Davis, *American Heroine, The Life and Legend of Jane Addams* (New York, 1973), p. 49; Washington Gladden, *Recollections* (Boston, 1909), pp. 353, 355–57.

<sup>19</sup> Davis, *American Heroine*, p. 51; Benjamin G. Rader, *The Academic Mind and Reform, the Influence of Richard T. Ely in American Life* (Lexington, Ky., 1966), p. 62.

<sup>20</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, p. 262.



labour men, all standing as Progressives. Ben Tillett, another working-class socialist and Burns's colleague in the great London dock strike of 1889, became an alderman in the same year.<sup>21</sup> By bringing labour leaders into the ruling coalition, and endorsing a programme of radical municipal reform, the London Progressives reached out to sources of working-class political support that the Liberals by themselves could never have hoped to attract. As Ray Stannard Baker, then a young Chicago reporter, perceptively noted in his private journal after the 1892 election, the London Progressives had 'championed many reforms for which the laborers of London have long been clamoring'. Although Baker was wrong in believing that before 1892 the Council had been under the control of the Conservatives, he was correct in his assessment that 'organized labor regards the late victory of the Progressives as their own'.<sup>22</sup>

'Progressive' in the British sense was a very inclusive term. It covered all those involved in the alliance of Liberals and Labour on the L.C.C. It could be applied to aristocratic Liberal grandees like Lord Rosebery, who was chairman of the L.C.C. during its first year and again for a brief period in 1892. It embraced working-class socialists like Burns and Tillett. And it could also be used to describe middle-class Fabian socialists like Sidney Webb, who was elected to the L.C.C. for the first time in the Progressive sweep of 1892. This capacity the word possessed to blur distinctions between groups of reformers proved most useful to those who, by the mid-1890s, were interested in a general alignment of left-wing forces. The *Progressive Review*, founded in London in 1896, was a good example of this tendency at work. It aimed to 'give due emphasis to the new ideas and sentiments of social justice' while fighting for 'a clear rational application of those principles in a progressive policy and a progressive party'. William Clark, editor of the *Review*, was a Fabian. His chief collaborators, Herbert Samuel, Ramsey MacDonald and J. A. Hobson, were, respectively, a Liberal Imperialist, a member of the new Independent Labour Party, and an economic heretic with Liberal antecedents.<sup>23</sup> Such diversity did not bode well for the future and, in fact, the *Review* did not survive for very long. Its collapse symbolized the weakness of attempting to create too

<sup>21</sup> Paul Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour, The Struggle for London 1885-1914* (London, 1967), pp. 81, 101, 103.

<sup>22</sup> R. S. Baker, *Notebook A* (1892-1894), pp. 18-19, Ray Stannard Baker Papers, Library of Congress. Albert Shaw mentioned the success of the London Progressives in an article he wrote for his influential and widely-read *Review of Reviews*. See Shaw, 'Municipal Problems of New York and London', *Review of Reviews*, 5 (February-July 1892), p. 284.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 57; Clarke, 'Progressive Movement in England', p. 160.

broad a coalition of left-wing forces, particularly once the issue of imperialism had been injected into political debate.<sup>24</sup> None of this was evident in 1896, however, when Jane Addams was introduced to the British Progressive movement. She was rowed down the Thames in a boat with Ben Tillett, cheered on by dockers who lined the wharves. She was shown around Battersea by John Burns. She heard Keir Hardie address an I.L.P. meeting in Canning Town and caught a glimpse of George Bernard Shaw at a reception given by Eleanor Marx. She was introduced to Hobson and the Webbs. 'It seemed that moment', she later recalled, remembering the excitement of it all, 'as if the hopes of democracy were more likely to come to pass upon English soil than upon our own.'<sup>25</sup>

It is clear, in retrospect, that Addams overestimated the strength and cohesion of the British left. As an outsider, she moved easily from group to group and sect to sect, usually without any very clear understanding of the issues that divided them. This was particularly true of her relationships with socialists, for British socialism, re-born in the 1880s, had already proved itself particularly susceptible to splits and factions. The Social Democratic Federation, founded as the Democratic Federation on the initiative of H. M. Hyndman in 1881, had followed a broadly Marxist path. Its members in the 1880s had included John Burns, Edward Aveling and his common-law wife, Eleanor Marx. All three had broken with Hyndman by the end of the decade. The Avelings went on to help found the Socialist League and then, by later secession, the Bloomsbury Socialist Society. The S.D.F. championed the cause of the unemployed in the later 1880s but, under Hyndman's erratic leadership, refused to have anything to do with the London Progressives.<sup>26</sup> The Fabian Society, founded in London in 1884 as a discussion group, brought together an impressive group of social thinkers: George Bernard Shaw joined before the end of 1884, Sidney Webb in 1885 and Graham Wallas in 1886. Its philosophy crystallized with the publication of *Fabian Essays on Socialism* (1889), in which various authors combined to advocate an anti-Marxist stance and to endorse the idea of a gradual march towards socialism through the tactic of 'permeating' other parties and organizations. Fabians consequently gave strong support to the Progressive movement in London: six of its members (Webb and five of the Labour men) were elected to the L.C.C. as Progressives in 1892.<sup>27</sup> But the doctrine of 'permeation' proved

<sup>24</sup> Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>25</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, pp. 263-65.

<sup>26</sup> Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour*, pp. 112-14, 124, 136-37, 151-52.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103n; A. M. McBriar, *Fabian Socialism and English Politics 1884-1918* (Cambridge, 1966), p. 198.

unsatisfactory to some Fabians like Keir Hardie and Ramsey MacDonald, who were ultimately convinced of the necessity for working men to have a party of their own within the wider Progressive coalition: Hardie played a major role in founding the Independent Labour Party in 1893, and MacDonald joined the following year.

American progressives found little to interest them in the Marxist certainties of the S.D.F. They enjoyed meeting other British socialists and labour leaders. Charles Beard, for example, while organizing the extension department of Ruskin Hall, Oxford, the working-class college he had helped found in 1899, mixed easily with leaders of the new unionism like Tillett and Labour politicians such as Burns, MacDonald and Hardie.<sup>28</sup> But it was unquestionably with the Fabians that American progressives developed the closest rapport. The Fabians were middle-class intellectuals who believed that to change society would be a long and difficult process. They had no faith in sudden, cataclysmic solutions. Evolution, to them, was always preferable to revolution. They recoiled from ideas of class solidarity and the class war. However, they were convinced, in an undogmatic way, that society had to move in the direction of a greater collectivism. In all these things, they mirrored the progressives. Moreover, the Fabians regarded themselves almost from the beginning as part of a world-wide movement for change and betterment. The *Progressive Review*, edited by a Fabian, had given a good deal of attention to what it thought of as 'The Progressive Movement Abroad'. In furtherance of this purpose, Henry Demarest Lloyd, the Illinois reformer, was asked 'to give them the American outlook'. Lloyd, in turn, asked Jane Addams if she would write two or three hundred words on the social settlement situation in America for transmission on to London. 'It would', he assured her, 'help the spread of the socialising idea.'<sup>29</sup>

The ties between British Fabians and American progressives become most clearly visible of all in the correspondence of American academics like Richard Ely and Edward Ross. Just as progressives inside the United States sent each other copies of their books, read them, learned from them and argued over them, progressive social thinkers on opposite sides of the Atlantic were eager to compare notes. Often, they requested publishers to send copies of their latest work to a variety of acquaintances abroad. 'Thank you very much for your appreciative letter,' the then-Fabian

<sup>28</sup> John Braeman, 'Charles A. Beard: The English Experience', *Journal of American Studies*, 15 (August 1981), pp. 175, 181.

<sup>29</sup> Clarke, 'Progressive Movement in England', p. 160; Henry D. Lloyd to Addams, 23 Feb. 1896, Addams Papers.

H. G. Wells scribbled on a postcard to Ross in 1904, 'I knew your "Social Control" & it was at my request that Messrs Scribner sent you my book. It's pleasant indeed to find you know my other things.'<sup>30</sup> For the most part, of course, this sending of books elicited little more than perfunctory expressions of gratitude (though Sidney Webb did damn Ely's *Introduction to Political Economy* with faint praise as a book 'which on the whole I like very much...'). Sometimes, however, Fabians and progressives sent each other manuscripts for comment and criticism. Episodes of this kind reveal more about transatlantic co-operation than letters of formal thanks for complimentary books. Inviting such criticism is a sign of concerned and close collaboration. When Ely sent Webb the draft of a new book (presumably *Socialism: An Examination of Its Nature, Its Strengths and Its Weakness*) in 1894, Webb detected a number of mistakes and omissions. 'I send these free criticisms and suggestions', he wrote, in drawing them to Ely's attention, 'because I know you always welcome such, and because it is the way in which we can all best help one another's thought.'<sup>31</sup>

## II

The kind of friendship and easy camaraderie that developed between American progressives and British socialists and advanced Liberals was only rarely reproduced in relations between the progressives and their counterparts in continental Europe. In the first place, there was frequently a problem of communication. By no means all American schools and colleges offered the opportunity to learn a foreign language. Even when such courses existed, they were usually fairly rudimentary. Washington Gladden had taken French during his junior year at Williams College. The year 1888 found him in Brussels, fuming at the stupidity of cabmen and porters who were baffled by what Gladden curiously termed 'my Parisian accent'. He consoled himself with the thought that Belgians probably spoke 'a corrupted dialect' instead of pure French, and looked forward to the day when they would all speak the language as he did. Unfortunately, in the same letter, he was unwise enough to give some examples of the French he was using. Poor teaching, however, was only one part of the difficulty. For even progressives who had acquired the fluent command of a language, usually by studying for a time in Europe, found that as the

<sup>30</sup> Wells to Ross, 19 July 1904, Edward A. Ross Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

<sup>31</sup> Webb to Ely, 19 Sept. 1889, Ely Papers; Webb to Ely, 21 Feb. 1894, *The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Vol. II: Partnership, 1892-1912*, ed. Norman Mackenzie (Cambridge, 1978), p. 14.

years went by they tended to forget. Frederic Howe reported that he was getting some work done on his 1909 visit to Europe, 'but not as much as I would like, for my German and French are a trifle lame'.<sup>32</sup>

The rise of socialism was a more serious factor complicating the relations between American and European reformers. In continental Europe socialists constituted the principal challenge to the *status quo*, whereas in England, where liberalism remained strong, socialism was more important as an intellectual influence than as a political movement. 'There are no statistics of [British] Socialism,' Webb informed Ely in 1894, 'indeed, I doubt whether the nominal membership of the few avowedly Socialist propagandist bodies varies very much. They are all actually what the Fabian Society is explicitly, rather nuclei of educational influence, than numerically strong voting armies.' The British socialists the progressives had known were not numerous enough to be threatening. Nor did this situation alter overnight. Despite the increasing number of socialist M.P.s, elected as a result of trade union support, Walter Rauschenbusch was explaining as late as 1911 that England's growing pauperism resulted from the fact that there existed 'no powerful Socialist vote to enforce remedial measures'.<sup>33</sup> In continental Europe, where there was little liberalism of the Anglo-American variety, and the middle ground was correspondingly weaker, precisely the opposite was true. In 1903, Ely drew the attention of one of his correspondents to 'the present fact that socialism is by far the largest political party in Germany; that it has become so formidable in France that a socialist has been a member of the Cabinet; and that it is growing rapidly in other countries'. While in his opinion this did not necessarily foreshadow the final triumph of socialism, it did mean 'that intelligent people are going to give it far more attention during the next twenty years than during the past, indefinitely more'.<sup>34</sup>

Ely had been entirely consistent in his belief that those who wished to understand social developments throughout the industrialized world could not afford to ignore the European socialist movement. His first book, published in 1883, had been devoted to a study of the evolution of socialism in France and Germany, written for the benefit of an American

<sup>32</sup> Gladden to Children, 18 July 1888, roll 2, frame 0570, Gladden Papers; Howe to Lincoln Steffens, 18 May 1909, Lincoln Steffens Papers, Columbia University Library.

<sup>33</sup> Webb to Ely, 1 Feb. 1894, *Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb*, 2, p. 13; Rauschenbusch, 'The Socialist Movement and the World-Wide Unrest', *Rochester Times*, 16 Dec. 1911, *Scrapbook* (1911-1912), p. 81, Rauschenbusch Papers.

<sup>34</sup> Ely to F. M. Colby, 2 Feb. 1903, Ely Papers; cf. Howe to Steffens, 22 July 1909, Steffens Papers.

audience.<sup>35</sup> In 1881, G. Stanley Hall had discussed the socialist movement in Germany in his own first published work; by the 1890s, Walter Rauschenbusch would be writing and lecturing on the same topic. All three recognized the difficulties involved in discussing such a subject at a time when large sections of the American population regarded socialism with a deep suspicion amounting almost to paranoia. To most Americans, there was no difference between socialism, anarchism and communism. Those who believed in philosophical communism were frequently confused with the violent Parisian Communards of 1871.<sup>36</sup> Many Americans chose to regard the Haymarket bombing of 1886 in Chicago, and the subsequent trial of mostly foreign-born anarchists that resulted, as proof that European-style socialism was spreading to the United States.<sup>37</sup> 'To many of us', Rauschenbusch declared, 'the idea of Socialism is bound up with low, red-nosed men, swearing and fuming in beer-dives, threatening to blow up all creation with dynamite, hoping to divide up all the property and then live without working.' This stereotype, he conceded, unfortunately had some foundation in fact. Many socialists were 'mere jaw-smiths, with hearts full of hate against God and men'. But the movement as a whole, he believed, was redeemed as a political faith by the presence in its ranks of many idealists, 'noble and courageous men... who have suffered for what they held to be right'.<sup>38</sup>

The problem faced by Rauschenbusch, as by Hall and Ely before him, was that, in the prevailing climate of American opinion, anyone who wrote about European socialism was liable to be categorized and vilified as a socialist. In facing up to this difficulty, Ely developed an elaborate rationale. Ignorance of socialism, he argued in the opening pages of *French and German Socialism in Modern Times* (1883), was dangerous. Unless Americans understood the true nature of socialism and the socialist appeal, they would be unable to counter it. It was not enough merely to denounce

<sup>35</sup> Ely also lectured on the subject at Johns Hopkins. One of his students there, Albert Shaw, was obliged to write a succinct account of French and German socialism as part of his Ph.D. thesis. A week after taking his degree, Shaw started work on the *Minneapolis Tribune*, and deeply impressed its proprietor by what the latter thought to be his ability, at will, to dash off impromptu articles on such subjects as – European socialism. Richard T. Ely, *Ground Under Our Feet: An Autobiography* (New York, 1938), p. 105.

<sup>36</sup> Ely, *French and German Socialism in Modern Times* (New York and London, 1883), p. 20.

<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, Rauschenbusch denied that this was possible. 'If socialism ever makes headway here', he declared, 'it will be because there is cause for it, and it will be an American type of socialism.' Rauschenbusch, *Scrapbook*, 10 (1901–1902), p. 112, Rauschenbusch Papers.

<sup>38</sup> Rauschenbusch, 'In Germany', Scrapbook marked 'Personals (1890–)', Rauschenbusch Papers.

socialists and misrepresent their views; such tactics, Ely claimed, were likely in the end to prove counter-productive, heightening support for the creed under attack. What was needed was a neutral and scholarly account, providing 'a perfectly fair, impartial presentation' of the roots of contemporary socialism. Ely's own book, analysing the rise of socialism in its two strongholds of France and Germany, was designed to fill this need. It discussed socialism in a non-partisan way. 'I believe', he wrote, in an attempt to mollify conservative critics, 'that, in so doing, I am rendering a service to the friends of law and order.'<sup>39</sup> Clearly, even in the *lehrfreiheit* atmosphere of Johns Hopkins University, where Ely taught from 1881 to 1892, it was necessary to avoid too close an identification with unpopular causes. Equally clearly, though never a socialist himself, Ely was more sympathetic to the socialist point of view than he deemed it politic to say in print. 'I think I am not wrong in supposing that *you* go further towards a socialistic remedy than your position renders it possible or wise for you to adopt in your book,' wrote British scientist Alfred R. Wallace after reading Ely's later textbook on political economy in 1889.<sup>40</sup> It is questionable, however, how far his position was understood by Americans generally. Even years later, when progressivism itself had reached flood tide, it was still a novelty to find socialism being discussed in neutral terms. In December 1911, Rauschenbusch lectured to a home-town audience on 'The Socialist Movement and the World-Wide Unrest'. 'There was an unusual note struck in this address', commented the *Rochester Times*, 'due to the fact that it was made from the standpoint of a sympathetic and well-informed observer, rather than a rabid adherent or bitter opponent of the movement.'<sup>41</sup>

The progressives were aware that European socialism was far from being a monolithic movement. The way they reacted to each different variety reveals a good deal about their own attitudes and ideas. After anarchism, which they loosely identified with socialism but tended to dismiss because of its association with violence, they felt least comfortable with what Frederic Howe called 'militant state socialism, such as prevails in Germany'.<sup>42</sup> The German Social Democratic Party had been founded as a result of the agitation begun by Ferdinand Lassalle in 1862. Lassalle's objective, according to Ely, was the achievement 'of a radical change [in society] brought about peacefully, which he called a peaceful revolution'.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Ely, *French and German Socialism*, introduction; pp. 14-19.

<sup>40</sup> Wallace to Ely, 6 Dec. 1889, Ely Papers.

<sup>41</sup> *Rochester Times*, 16 Dec. 1911, *Scrapbook* (1911-1912), p. 81, Rauschenbusch Papers.

<sup>42</sup> Howe, *British City*, p. 63. I have changed the 'M' in militant to lower case.

<sup>43</sup> Ely, *French and German Socialism*, pp. 189-191, 232; cf. Granville Stanley Hall, *Aspects of German Culture* (Boston, 1881), pp. 58-65.

After his death in 1864, the Social Democrats profited from the introduction of universal male suffrage in the North German Confederation in 1867, and in national elections throughout the new German Empire from 1871, to become an increasingly powerful political force. But, under the leadership of men like Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel, the party moved further to the left. The emphasis on peaceful revolution was succeeded by a determination to bring about the downfall of the monarchy and the old Prusso-German order which it represented. As Walter Rauschenbusch pointed out, few Americans brought up to believe in republican government and the right of a people to govern itself were likely to quarrel with such a programme. But Rauschenbusch and other progressive writers were far less happy with the manner in which the Social Democrats expected to achieve their aims, or with the kind of society they proposed to erect in place of the old. By the late 1870s, Ely noted, German Social Democrats had come to believe in 'the violent overthrow of existing institutions by revolution to precede the introduction of the socialist state'.<sup>44</sup> It was their pervasive anti-monarchism and growing dalliance with the idea of violent revolution that made it possible, after two attempts had been made on the life of the Kaiser, for Bismarck to pass the anti-socialist law of 1878. Hall watched the debates in the Reichstag that accompanied the passing of the *Ausnahmegesetz* of 1878 and later, assessing its effectiveness, concluded that it had been largely effective in suppressing socialism throughout the German Empire. Ely, writing in 1883, vigorously disagreed. The elections of 1881 had shown a surge rather than a diminution of socialist strength. Indeed, he argued, there was considerable evidence that the Social Democrats had been languishing in 1878 and that Bismarck's persecutions had breathed new life into the party.<sup>45</sup>

Ely looked with far more favour on Bismarck's other attempt to weaken socialism, the positive side of his policy of repression. The Social Democrats had fed upon the discontent of the labouring classes; through social legislation, by removing some of their legitimate grievances, Bismarck proposed to win back the support of the masses. Early in 1881, he announced plans to introduce a system of accident insurance to cover industrial workers. In 1882, his proposal passed the Reichstag, with the support – among others – of Social Democrats like Bebel. 'All this', Ely wrote, 'makes a strange impression on us when we remember the cruelties and persecutions which the social democrats have suffered through the instrumentality of the great German statesman.' The truce, of course, was

<sup>44</sup> Rauschenbusch, 'In Germany'; Ely, *French and German Socialism*, pp. 204, 209–13, 231–32.

<sup>45</sup> Hall, *Aspects of German Culture*, pp. 88–90, 93; Ely, *French and German Socialism*, pp. 214–15.



only temporary: the *mésalliance* of Bebel and Bismarck soon broke up and the unequal struggle between supporters of socialism and agents of the Imperial government continued.

A careful reading of Ely's comments on the proposal for accident insurance (the only one of Bismarck's proposals to have reached the statute book before Ely's book was published in 1883) reveals that Ely himself did not expect Bismarck's efforts to extirpate socialism to succeed: socialists were only articulating 'latent feelings', hidden thoughts that were widespread amongst the labouring classes. It would take far more than palliative measures, Ely concluded, 'before the conflict between capitalist and laborer – between rich and poor – will cease to disturb the peace of Christendom'.<sup>46</sup> Rauschenbusch, reviewing the passing of the insurance scheme to provide financial support in old age, the last great set-piece of Bismarckian social legislation, came to a markedly similar conclusion, bluntly predicting 'that these laws will not have the effect anticipated of satisfying the demands of the laboring classes'. A year later, Lincoln Steffens reported that there was very great nervousness in Germany over the result of the coming election. 'Bismarck', he wrote, 'is very anxious about the results, but has prepared himself for a hard fight. He's now a very old man and will not probably live through many more elections. The tendency in Germany, from what I can see and judge of, is towards a socialistic régime.'<sup>47</sup> By the beginning of the twentieth century, the German government was no longer powerful enough to repress socialism effectively, but it was too powerful to be overthrown. Its efforts to win support away from the Social Democrats by passing remedial legislation had all failed and, despite the insurance schemes enacted on his behalf, the lot of the German working man was still extremely poor.<sup>48</sup>

The progressives never developed close personal ties with German Social Democrats in the way they tended to do with British socialists. Legal limitations on Social Democracy were in force in Germany between 1878 and 1890 – the period when Hall, Ely, and Rauschenbusch were

<sup>46</sup> Ely, *ibid.*, pp. 216–21.

<sup>47</sup> Rauschenbusch, 'State Insurance in Germany', *Personals* (1890–); Steffens to Lou Steffens, 3 Feb. 1980, *The Letters of Lincoln Steffens, Vol. I: 1889–1919*, Ella Winter and Granville Hicks, eds. (New York, 1938), pp. 41–42.

<sup>48</sup> Ray Stannard Baker was only half-joking when he remarked in 1901 that if the German workman ever seriously began to consider his position, 'he does one of two things – he either becomes a socialist or he commits suicide. So socialism, though held down by bands of steel, is rampant everywhere in Germany.' Baker, *Seen in Germany* (New York, 1901), p. 122.

making their first attempts to interpret continental socialism. It would have been tactless, to say the least, for visiting Americans to have become involved with the leaders of a proscribed political movement. Hall heard Liebknecht and Bebel speak in the Reichstag (most probably, Ely did too), but there was no social contact.<sup>49</sup> The progressives in any case had little in common with men committed to the Marxist idea that historical forces would inevitably lead to the triumph of the proletariat. Ely tried to be as neutral as possible, while writing about the leaders of German Social Democracy, but his own bias kept breaking through. Liebknecht, he conceded, was a man of fundamental honesty and integrity; as a political leader, however, he was accustomed to adopt 'extreme positions' and 'must be called a demagogue'. Ely made a sharp distinction between Liebknecht's private character and the attitudes he felt compelled to adopt in his public role. For whatever his personal virtues, 'when the cause of the social democrats is concerned...he shows himself unscrupulous, exciting envy and discontent, and arousing class against class'.<sup>50</sup> American progressives, then or later, had little patience with the Marxist emphasis on the class war, and rejected political creeds that depended for their success on the overthrow of existing society by violent means. Ely himself was distrustful of the way German Social Democrats tended to glorify the idea of the revolution. There was always a good chance, he believed, that a socialist revolution would replace the existing order with something far worse. As an American and as a democrat, Ely was deeply suspicious of the way Social Democratic agitators talked approvingly of the German army as a model for the future organization of a socialist state: whatever advantages this might bring, he wrote, 'it is terrible to think of army discipline extending itself over society in all its ramifications'.<sup>51</sup>

The progressives tended to view British Fabianism, with its emphasis on gradual progress through peaceful change, as the next step on the road of socialist evolution. There was more than an element of self-deception in this view – the German Social Democratic Party was, after all, the largest socialist party in Europe and the Fabians only a comparatively small group of intellectuals – but it did serve to make the Social Democrats, with their crude, unvarnished Marxist appeal, seem distinctly *passé*. When Jane Addams met Liebknecht in 1896, at a reception in London given by Eleanor Marx, she obviously regarded him as the representative of a dying breed and was happy to see him for that very reason, glad to have caught

<sup>49</sup> G. Stanley Hall, *Life and Confessions of a Psychologist* (New York, 1927), p. 192; Ely, *Ground*, p. 51.      <sup>50</sup> Ely, *French and German Socialism*, pp. 228, 230.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 204–6, 209.

‘a glimpse of the old-fashioned orthodox Socialist who had not yet begun to yield to the biting ridicule of Bernard Shaw...’.<sup>52</sup> Long before the mid-1890s, in fact, American progressives appear to have concluded that there was nothing they could learn from German Social Democracy, and thereafter they put the subject out of their minds. They seem, for instance, to have been almost completely unaware of the controversy within the Social Democratic Party provoked by the publication of Eduard Bernstein’s *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus* in 1899. In this famous book (translated into English as *Evolutionary Socialism*), Bernstein, who had lived in London and been influenced by Fabians like Shaw, mounted the first serious intellectual challenge to the Marxist orthodoxy of German Social Democracy. Had the progressives known of Bernstein’s work, of course, they might only have regarded it as further confirmation of their theory about the direction in which European socialist thought was moving.

As well-educated members of the American middle class, the progressives expected little or nothing from a party that recruited most of its strength from common labourers. Such men, Hall wrote, were motivated by envy of those more fortunate than themselves, ‘without having any sort of theory of the relations between labor and capital, and without any thought or suggestion... respecting the ways and means of reform’. Despite the presence in its ranks of men like Bebel, an artisan well able to hold his own with the best orators in the Reichstag, German Social Democracy was dismissed by Hall ‘as the consensus of the incompetent upon properly professional questions’.<sup>53</sup> In this respect the Social Democrats were apparently proving themselves poor successors to the great theoreticians of German socialism, Rodbertus, Lassalle, and Karl Marx. Hall and Ely, while rejecting many of the conclusions reached by these men, admired them for the profundity of their systems and the scientific nature of their approach to economic life. One of the leading characteristics of German theoretical socialism, Ely approvingly declared, was ‘its thoroughly scientific spirit... Histories, blue books, and statistical journals are searched, and facts are piled on facts, mountain-high, to sustain every separate and individual proposition.’<sup>54</sup> By Hall’s own admission, he returned from Germany half-accepting what he understood of Marx because of the rigorous scientific methodology enshrined in *Das Kapital*.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, p. 264.

<sup>53</sup> Ely, *French and German Socialism*, pp. 204, 230–31; Hall, *Aspects of German Culture*, pp. 21, 91.

<sup>54</sup> Ely, *French and German Socialism*, pp. 156–57.

<sup>55</sup> Hall, *Life and Confessions*, p. 222; Hall, *Aspects of German Culture*, p. 62. Ely, who also admired the scientific quality of *Capital*, conceded that it made difficult reading, though ‘not because it is poorly written, but because it is deep’. Ely, *French and German Socialism*, p. 173.

To progressives, who respected science and expertise, it seemed that the true heirs to Marx were not the Social Democrats but 'socialists of the chair', men like Johannes Conrad, Adolph Wagner, Gustav Schmoller and Ludwig Brentano, who advocated a properly scientific approach to the subject of social reform. These university professors, organized after 1872 into the *Verein für Sozialpolitik*, laid the intellectual and sociological foundations for the Bismarckian legislation of the 1880s. Though not socialists at all in 'the ordinary or vulgar signification of the term', they were, Ely argued, socialists in the broader sense because they faced up to the problems that could no longer be solved by individuals and advocated dealing with them through collective or 'social' means.<sup>56</sup> Unlike the Social Democrats (who, Rauschenbusch noted, opposed the old-age insurance legislation of 1889<sup>57</sup>), they were deeply practical in their approach to reform. To the progressives, members of a pragmatic generation, the professorial socialists, with their record of modest but real achievement, were infinitely preferable to the Social Democrats with all their inflammatory but impotent rhetoric.

The professorial socialists had another attraction for the progressives: they did not believe that social problems could be solved by economic adjustments alone, but required ethical change, the 'transformation and moral elevation of the various social elements'. Only when men ceased to think primarily in terms of their own economic self-interest could real progress be made. With this realization, Ely explained, professorial socialism came face to face with Christian Socialism. 'Professors of political economy', he wrote, 'finding themselves forced to abandon every hope of reconciling adverse interests of society without a moral and religious regeneration of the various social classes, turn to Christianity, and appeal to it for co-operation in their endeavors to bring about an era of peace and harmony.'<sup>58</sup> Adolph Wagner, a professor at Berlin University and a pious Lutheran, was a good representative of the kind of marriage between socialism of the chair and social Christianity Ely had in mind. The problem was that the only kind of Christian Socialism American progressives like Ely could genuinely identify with and encourage, namely the Protestant variety, never really made much progress in continental Europe. Unlike the Catholic social movement that gathered momentum in the 1880s, and the rising challenge of Social Democracy,<sup>59</sup> Protestant

<sup>56</sup> Hall, *Aspects of German Culture*, p. 62; Ely, *French and German Socialism*, pp. 236-37, 240.

<sup>57</sup> Rauschenbusch, 'State Insurance in Germany.'

<sup>58</sup> Ely, *French and German Socialism*, pp. 221, 242, 244, 245.

<sup>59</sup> 'The social democracy in Germany', Rauschenbusch wrote from the perspective of 1913, 'has rather cowed the Christian social thinkers in Germany so that they are rather

Christian Socialism failed to gather any real support from amongst the urban masses. Ely dismissed the Germans as too unimportant 'to justify much more than the mention of their existence'. He was repelled by the crude anti-semitism of their most well-known leaders, particularly court-chaplain Adolph Stöcker. 'Instead of proposals to ameliorate the condition of laborers', he wrote in disgust after attending one of their meetings, 'I heard little save abuse of the Jews.'<sup>60</sup> In France, a predominantly Catholic country where Protestants in any case laboured under severe disadvantages, a small group of Protestant Christian Socialists continued to flourish. 'I wonder if you know of the activity of the French group of Christian-Socialists or Social Christians,' Rauschenbusch wrote to Washington Gladden in 1912. 'They have produced a very remarkable literature, far in advance, I think, of our American social literature in point of theological and scientific ability.'<sup>61</sup>

When Ely turned his attention to the subject of French socialism generally he paid tribute to the influence of Saint-Simon, Fourier, and – above all – Proudhon on the development of socialist thought. But he saw little that was either interesting or particularly original about the contemporary French socialist movement. It could, he thought, be divided into three main groups: followers of Auguste Blanqui, social revolutionaries with no clear vision of what was to follow the revolution; anarchists, then (in 1883) more philosophical than violent, a situation that was to change by the 1890s; and what Ely termed 'collectivists', men who followed the lead of German thinkers like Marx and Lassalle.<sup>62</sup> All three groups believed in the desirability of ultimate revolution. They had little or no appeal, therefore, to the one progressive who spent more time in France than any of the others, Ida Tarbell.<sup>63</sup> Miss Tarbell did not believe in revolution. From her historical studies of the French Revolution and her observation of the revolt of the Latin Quarter and the Beaux Arts in July 1893, she became convinced that all revolutions had their own

tame and do not get much beyond mild reform talk.' Rauschenbusch to J. F. Franklin, 16 June 1913, copy in Rauschenbusch Papers.

<sup>60</sup> Ely, *French and German Socialism*, pp. 256–57.

<sup>61</sup> Rauschenbusch to Gladden, 10 Feb. 1912, roll 9, frame 0908, Gladden Papers. Also see Ely, 'The French Protestant Association for the Practical Study of Social Questions', *Virginia Seminary Magazine*, 5 (June 1892), pp. 373–78.

<sup>62</sup> Ely, *French and German Socialism*, pp. 108, 128–29, 143, 145–49.

<sup>63</sup> Two more of the progressives on whom this article is based lived in France for a time. Albert Shaw spent some time in Paris, studying contemporary politics, after gaining his Ph.D. He wrote articles on French topics for the *Minneapolis Tribune* in 1888–1889 and later for the *Review of Reviews*. Lincoln Steffens also lived in Paris for several months in 1891–1892.

inexorable logic: they never remained for very long under the control of the idealists who began them.<sup>64</sup> The only socialism Miss Tarbell had any time for was that of Charles Seignobos, Sorbonne professor of history and 'a not too dogmatic socialist and materialist' who admitted her to his own circle of friends. At these Wednesday evening soirées, one of the regular attenders was Lucien Herr, Librarian of the École Normale and one of the most prominent socialist intellectuals of the time. 'Occasionally', Miss Tarbell remembered, 'Lucien...brought to the Seignobos circle one of those whom he was seeking to convert. If [Jean] Jaurès and [Léon] Blum were ever among them they made no particular impression on me, much as I dislike to say so. They were simply a couple of Lucien's young men.' Seignobos and Herr between them represented a new kind of socialism, somewhat akin to the Fabians in England and revisionists like Bernstein in Germany. They believed in the achievement of the socialist state through evolution rather than revolution. Both men were opposed to violence, although Miss Tarbell did note, from Herr's comparative indifference as an observer on the night Vaillant threw his bomb into the Chamber of Deputies, that his opposition to bloodshed was purely abstract and intellectual and not, like that of Seignobos, instinctive and deeply emotional.<sup>65</sup>

### III

Socialists recruited from the École Normale could hardly be described as agitators from the depths of society. The progressives do, indeed, seem to have felt most comfortably at home with middle-class academics and intellectuals, advocating a programme of moderate socialist reform. Only in England did they come into real contact with working-class socialist leaders, and it is hard to escape the conclusion that they saw in these men only what they wanted to see. John Burns did not appeal to them in the 1890s because of his record as an ex-S.D.F. firebrand who had been to jail for his beliefs, still less as one of the militant leaders of the dock strike of 1889. He appealed because, as one of the Progressive members of the L.C.C., he was a leading spokesman for municipal socialism. American urban reformers who were interested in this limited 'gas and water' version of socialism for their own cities saw Burns as a kindred spirit: Frederic Howe remembered tramping over Battersea with him in 1891,

<sup>64</sup> Ida M. Tarbell, *All in the Day's Work, An Autobiography* (New York, 1941), pp. 124, 127-30.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 132-33.

while Burns spelt out his vision 'of the London that was to be'.<sup>66</sup> Keir Hardie appealed to American progressives for a different reason. Ignoring his determined championship of the idea of working-class solidarity, they chose to focus on his ethical idealism, the way his socialism was heavily impregnated with phrases and sentiments from the New Testament. 'Keir Hardie was here yesterday', Jane Addams wrote from Hull House in 1895, defending Hardie against charges of extremism levelled at him by the newspapers, 'he too [like Christian Socialist George D. Herron] has a religious message in spite of the remarks of the Chicago press.'<sup>67</sup>

The progressives applied the same kind of selectivity when it came to discussing the ideas of socialist groups they approved of, such as the Fabians. They stressed only those things that fitted with their own preconceptions of how reform should be accomplished, and played down or ignored other features, however important they might seem to some socialists. To the progressives, the Fabians were primarily important as propagandists for municipal socialism. 'It was the Fabians', Frederic Howe later wrote,

who first gave literary expression to the movement. They formulated a programme of municipalization, of evolutionary socialism, and the decentralization of government. They have produced a literature which has profoundly influenced public opinion, and formulated a conscious ideal of municipal possibilities that is the inspiration of a multitude of workers.

Beginning with the tract *Facts for Londoners* in 1889, largely written by Sidney Webb, and continuing with Webb's pamphlet *The London Programme*, which appeared in 1891, the Fabians set out proposals for a great enlargement of municipal activities. It may be questioned, however, how far their programme was socialist. The Fabian plans for London only seemed radical because other cities had a fifty-year lead in facing up to the problems of an urban and industrial environment. Even municipal ownership of utilities, the most 'socialist' of the Fabian demands, was by no means new: Joseph Chamberlain had espoused it while mayor of Birmingham in the 1870s. After municipal socialism, Howe gave most space in his discussion of Fabian ideas to the socialization of land values. This also was neither new nor particularly socialist: Henry George had advocated it, on the grounds that when urban land increased in value as a result of rising population and expanding services, the city should recoup

<sup>66</sup> Howe, *British City*, p. 214. Howe only referred to meeting Burns 'in the early nineties', but it seems clear that this must have been during his 1891 trip to Europe. See Howe, *Confessions of a Reformer*, p. 32.

<sup>67</sup> Addams to Mary Rozet Smith, 4 Sept. 1895, Addams Papers.

the incremental gain in the form of taxation. Howe's endorsement of this comparatively minor feature of the Fabian programme had less to do with his understanding of Fabian socialism than it did with his years of intimate association with Tom L. Johnson, Mayor of Cleveland and a long-time devotee of George's ideas.<sup>68</sup>

If we concentrate our attention, as Howe did in the case of the Fabians, solely on particular aspects of the programmes drawn up by various European left-wing groups, American progressivism can be made to appear part of an international movement. Demands for municipal socialism, the eight-hour day, workmen's compensation, and protection against insecurity in sickness and old age were the common currency of reform movements on both sides of the Atlantic as men sought to adapt their society and institutions to the new reality of an urban, machine-based civilization. On his first visit to Europe in 1909, William Allen White was much impressed by the international dimensions of this struggle.<sup>69</sup> But if we look at the progressives' relations with European leftists and their attitudes towards European social movements, a different and more complicated picture emerges. It becomes, for example, impossible to sustain the view put forward by George Mowry and Arthur Ekirch that American progressivism and European social democracy were essentially one movement. Social democracy was too Marxist, too doctrinaire and too class-based to appeal to Americans who preferred a pragmatic approach to reform and did not recognize the existence of hard-and-fast class divisions in their own society.<sup>70</sup> The progressives were drawn to reformers cast in the same undogmatic mould as themselves. This limited their contact with the continental European left. Ely established links with German professorial 'socialists', Rauschenbusch with French Christian Socialists and Tarbell with the evolutionary socialists of the *École Normale*, but that was all. It is therefore difficult to see how American progressives and continental reformers could regard themselves as part of the same movement in anything but the very vaguest sense.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Howe, *British City*, pp. 57–58, 63–65; Howe, *Confessions of a Reformer*, pp. 95–98, 129.

<sup>69</sup> William Allen White, *The Autobiography of William Allen White* (New York, 1946), pp. 409–10.

<sup>70</sup> Richard Ely, for example, assumed that the American industrial struggle was not class-based while the European one was. If the United States were to imitate European society in this respect, he warned, 'dire evils are in store for us'. Ely, *French and German Socialism*, p. 28.

<sup>71</sup> Peter Filene pointed out that a movement 'consists of persons who share a knowing relationship to one another'. Peter G. Filene, 'An Obituary for "The Progressive Movement"', *American Quarterly*, 22 (Spring 1970), p. 21. By this definition, American and continental reformers did not constitute a movement.



The situation was different in England, where there were no linguistic, political or ideological barriers to co-operation. American reformers were welcomed by the British left. Indeed, had Charles Beard not opted to return to the United States in 1902, it is likely that he would have become a figure of considerable importance in the British Labour movement.<sup>72</sup> American progressives were soon following the successes and failures of their British associates with close and benevolent attention. They were particularly interested during the 1890s in the fact that British Liberals, Christian Socialists, Labour leaders and Fabian intellectuals were showing themselves willing to set aside their differences and join forces in pursuit of common objectives. Much of the unity and promise of this British 'Progressive Movement', however, was dissipated in the Boer War. Imperialism as an issue divided the British left<sup>73</sup> while the war itself distracted attention from social reform at home. In 1900, when Jane Addams made her fourth visit to London, she noted a marked contrast between the wartime neglect of social ills and the enthusiasm for remedying them that had existed four years earlier.<sup>74</sup> But Americans never abandoned hope in their British colleagues and the election of a Liberal government in January 1906 revived the prospects for reform. When Lloyd George introduced his budget of 1909, which called among other things for a tax on land, progressives observed the battle with the House of Lords that resulted 'not as outsiders'.<sup>75</sup> William Allen White, who was in London for part of the debate, was sufficiently stirred to join in the great demonstration organized in support of Lloyd George's proposals.<sup>76</sup> The budget controversy increased the sense of identification that already existed between British and American reformers. It underlined, for American progressives, the fact that they and their British counterparts were facing a similar enemy and fighting much the same kind of fight for comparable ends.

<sup>72</sup> Keir Hardie predicted a great future for him. Braeman, p. 175. Another observer was even more enthusiastic. 'Aye! if we'd a lot o' young fellows like yon'd i' Tormden', one north-country sage reportedly remarked after hearing Beard speak at Todmorden, 'we'd turn it upside down i' a week.' Cited in Harlan B. Phillips, 'Charles Beard: The English Lectures, 1899-1901', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 14 (1953), p. 451.

<sup>73</sup> The Liberal party split between imperialists and pro-Boers. Old I.L.P. men such as Hardie and MacDonald tended to be determinedly anti-war. The Fabians divided amongst themselves: some of the more prominent members, including George Bernard Shaw and Sidney Webb, gave their support to imperialism.

<sup>74</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, p. 266. Braeman suggests that one of the reasons for Beard's decision to return to the United States in 1902 was his disillusionment over the prospects for change in Britain following the Boer War. Braeman, p. 186.

<sup>75</sup> Tom L. Johnson, progressive mayor of Cleveland, Ohio, as quoted in Mann, 'British Social Thought and American Reformers of the Progressive Era,' p. 676.

<sup>76</sup> White, *Autobiography*, pp. 418-19.