When William Morris died in 1896 the socialist movement was in the doldrums. The great days of the ’Eighties, when the SDF created an impression out of all proportion to its numbers were a fading memory. The electoral efforts of the ILP, founded in 1893, seemed to be no more than a flash in the pan. The split in the SDF had, according to Hyndman, put the socialist movement back twenty years. The Socialist League, which Morris had virtually financed, survived in the form of the Hammersmith Socialist Society, which may still be seen in a well known photograph.

Three years later all advanced causes suffered a severe setback with the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899. Both the SDF and the ILP were marking time. Almost by a fluke Keir Hardie had returned to Parliament in the Khaki Election of 1900, the year of the establishment of the Labour Representation Committee, shortly to be called the Labour Party. Then during the next few years Will Crooks won a great victory at Woolwich in a straight fight with a Conservative, David Shackleton, was returned unopposed for Clitheroe, while Arthur Henderson won Barnard Castle in a three-cornered contest. But these triumphs failed to elate the stern doctrinaires of the SDF.

Just after the 1906 elections, being then 16 years old, I joined the SDF. A boom in socialism had followed the election of 29 members of Parliament, sponsored by the LRC. The circulation of Robert Blatchford’s Clarion jumped from 56,000 to over 70,000 copies. It was not long before I mounted the socialist platform in Hyde Park and made my first open-air speech.

In the autumn of 1905 the advanced causes were lifting up their heads once more. I recall a demonstration on Clapham Common, organized by the Right to Work Council, at which I heard Keir Hardie speak. A more imposing gathering was held in Queen’s Hall early in the New Year. I remember H. M. Hyndman, then in his early sixties, saying that if emigration was the remedy for unemployment, Ireland would be a nation of millionaires, as Bernard Shaw could tell you, if he could tell
you nothing else. Shaw followed him, and remarked: ‘A remedy for unemployment? Knock half London down! Don’t knock down half Manchester, but knock down the whole of Manchester.’

I had joined the Westminster branch of the Social Democratic Federation, which was, in effect, a one-man band. Joe Butler, ‘the most notorious man in Westminster’, had cajoled half a dozen timid spirits into forming a branch of the socialist movement. The site of Dolphin Square was then occupied by the Royal Army Clothing Department, which employed a thousand or two men and women, who had been organised into a trade union, largely through the efforts of Butler. In 1903, Joe had collected six reluctant candidates and put them forward, under the aegis of the ‘Westminster Labour Representation Association’, to contest the St John’s Ward. They were victorious in a contest with six Moderate (or Conservative) and six Progressive (or Liberal) candidates.

Early in 1906 the SDF moved its headquarters to Chandos Hall, Maiden Lane, behind the Strand; the hall at the back was admirably suited to Sunday evening lectures which I began to attend. Bernard Shaw, rising sixty and just emerging into the sunlight of fame, was speaking one evening. Answering a question, GBS exclaimed: ‘I daresay I am unjust to Marx. I’m not God Almighty; I can’t be just to everybody.’ It was like Shaw to give a lift to old friends. Hyndman spoke about India to a crowded audience including many Indians. The anniversary of the Paris Commune was celebrated on the Sunday evening nearest to the March 18, when the speaker was Adolph Smith Headingley who was understood to have been an eye witness of events in Paris as a young man. Headingley was Special Commissioner of The Lancet, and his exposure of the conditions of the Chicago Packing Yards gave Upton Sinclair the material for his world famous novel, The Jungle. Harry Quelch, the editor of Justice, was second only to Hyndman in forming opinion in the party. In early manhood, already the father of a young family, he had worked as a packer in a Cannon Street warehouse. He had taught himself French and German, and was a formidable platform figure. Contrasted with Quelch was Herbert Burrows, paladin of all advanced causes, a facile talker and emotional orator.

A straggler from the days of the Socialist League was Dave Nicol, who hung on the fringe of socialist meetings, selling
picture postcards. He was a pathetic waif, emaciated face, ragged black beard, threadbare jacket, and no overcoat on cold winter evenings. He had contributed verses called *The Coming of the Light* to the socialist songbook and became editor of *The Commonweal* after Morris had left the League. An article he wrote attacking the authorities earned him a severe prison sentence which undermined his health. How he supported life and where he slept remained a mystery. He died in Highgate Infirmary sometime during the First World War.

Jim Connell, author of *The Red Flag*, had also known Morris. In 1889, after listening to a lecture by Herbert Burrows, Connell sat down in his bedroom and composed four or five verses which he called *The Red Flag*. The Labour Movement has been able to sing no other hymn, not even William Morris' *All for the Cause*, which was published in *Justice* in 1884, and sung to the tune of 'The Austrian Hymn'. This issue of *Justice* was on sale outside the west-end hall in which Hyndman debated with Charles Bradlaugh the proposition 'Will socialism benefit the English people?'