BRITISH BOLSHEVIKS?
The Socialist Labour Party

Some Limits of SLP Sectarianism

ankhurst and the Dreadnought were soon to return to their position as left-wing opponents of the “orthodox” Communists, advocating soviet democracy as vehemently as ever, while the CP (BSTI) as such was absorbed — with little trace — into the CPGB. By contrast, the Socialist Labour Party was to remain outside and hostile to the CP. True, some of its most prominent members formed the Communist Unity Group (CUG) in 1920 and subsequently enjoyed high-profile roles in the CPGB. True, also, there continued to be plenty of defections to the CP, both of members and entire branches. But, even though the issue of “unity” with the Communists remained a controversial issue within the SLP, as an organization, however much dwindled from its (not exactly massive) former size, it remained obdurate.

The SLP’s refusal to take part in the initial formation of the CPGB
in the summer of 1920 or in the Leeds Unity Conference in January of 1921, or to merge itself with the Communist Party subsequently, was less clearly related to the notion of soviet democracy than is the case with the hesitations of the CP (BST1) and Pankhurst’s subsequent position in the Workers’ Dreadnought. But there was a relationship nevertheless. In his account of the SLP, The Origins of British Bolshevism, Raymond Challinor cites the 1920 SLP conference report, which gave the party’s membership as 1,258, “almost a third of whom had joined in 1919.” And contrary to what he calls the “myth” that “the SLP was largely confined to skilled engineers on the Clyde,” he concludes that “probably by 1920 four-fifths of the SLP’s membership lay South of the Border.”¹ The SLP and its paper were based in Glasgow, but it is certainly true that branches from all parts of the UK featured in conference proceedings and branch reports published in The Socialist. While the January 1915 edition of The Socialist lists only one Scottish branch (Glasgow) and twelve English ones (Birmingham, Bristol, Croydon, Derby, Dewsbury, Leeds, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oxford, Sheffield, Southampton, and Wallsend-on-Tyne), the branch directory at the end of 1919 listed far more Scottish — and English — branches, totalling forty-four in all.² Some, at least, seem to have been active. The issue of 6 May 1920, for example, included branch reports from Oxford, Mid-Rhondda, Dewsbury, Belfast, Birmingham, Birkenhead, Coventry, Sheffield, Fleetwood, Edinburgh, and Paisley. As Challinor says, the SLP was by no means confined to Scotland.

In an earlier chapter we saw how the SLP had been very quick to identify itself as the “Bolshevik” party of Britain. Challinor cites several instances where this identification was made both by the SLP itself and on at least one occasion by no less than Lenin himself. And as late as 10 March 1921, after having rejected two opportunities to merge with the CPGB, the SLP was still insisting, in The Socialist, that “we belong to the Third International, and we are Bolsheviks.”³ In Challinor’s account, the problem was Lenin’s failure to understand the British socialist and labour movements and his consequent insistence on Labour Party affiliation.³ Seen in this light, it was a case of the SLP trying to be, if not more Catholic than the Pope, more genuinely Bolshevik.
than the Russian Bolsheviks’ preferred collaborators in Britain. But on closer examination the position seems to have been, as is so often the case, rather more complicated. Before examining the party’s version of soviet democracy and the — surprisingly “un-Bolshevik” — view it had of the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat,” it is worth taking a look at the extent to which the sectarianism and dogmatism often alleged at the time, and widely taken for granted subsequently, was actually reflected in the party’s principal organ, The Socialist.

There is no shortage of instances that may illustrate the self-congratulatory isolationism and sectarianism for which the SLP was noted. But this characterization is misleading if presented as the whole picture. At the time, what was striking about the SLP was its differences from other socialist organizations in Britain; today one is likely as frequently to notice the similarities. It is difficult to escape from a sort of template of total left-wing sectarianism derived from later times when one considers the SLP, but the attempt needs to be made if its nature is to be understood.

The SLP published a wide range of works by Marx, Engels, Bebel, and Kautsky, as well as those of “our late Comrade Daniel De Leon,” whose portrait was advertised for sale in The Socialist following his death in 1914. De Leon remained central to the SLP’s distinctive approach to Marxism. One might expect The Socialist to be constantly invoking the authority of Karl Marx, but in fact he is mentioned quite sparingly, except in articles that specifically discuss Marxist theory. Though The Socialist was always ready to point out the “incorrect” positions taken by other socialist groups, and De Leonist coinings such as “fakir” found their way into the language of its publications (and indeed became more frequent again in the paper’s latter days), some sense of membership in a common movement was always present. For example, early in 1921, when Helen Crawfurd, a prominent member of the ILP “Left Wing” and later of the CPGB, complained about The Socialist’s erroneous report that she was going to stand against John Maclean in the Gorbals election, the editor printed an apology in which he referred to her as “our comrade.” And the SLP shared many points of reference with the rest of the British socialist movement.

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Like other socialist organs in Britain, *The Socialist* would mark the March anniversary of the Paris Commune with a special supplement and, in an issue that must have gone to press before the March 1917 news from Russia could be noted, by the reprinting of an 1890 article by William Morris that might just as well have appeared in the pages of one of its rivals almost anywhere on the British Left. Material from other non-SLP sources appeared frequently in the paper. The December 1915 edition, for example, featured both extracts from Brailsford’s *War of Steel and Gold* and Tolstoy’s anti-militarist writings. In 1917, J. Walton Newbold, of the ILP, appeared as a contributor on several occasions (in the November issue, for example).

Many other works that were far from supportive of SLP orthodoxy were praised from time to time. In the space of little over a month in the summer of 1920, James Clunie, reviewing *Economic Democracy*, by Major C.H. Douglas, the apostle of Social Credit, thought it “in many ways a good book,” while Tawney’s *Acquisitive Society*, published by the Fabian Society, was declared “epoch-making.” Similarly, R.W. Postgate’s *The Bolshevik Theory* was described, again by Clunie, as “a valuable contribution to the literature on the Russian Revolution,” though he added, making a claim that might well be treated with a degree of skepticism: “Note. We would like to impress upon Mr. Postgate that the SLP did NOT expel all its active members in 1920. Active SLPers are never expelled.”

Much later, at the end of 1922, when *The Socialist* had again been reduced to monthly publication, a December review of Postgate’s *Out of the Past: Some Revolutionary Sketches* praised his treatment of Blanqui as being “as fascinating as a good short story.” Later still, in the issue of March 1923, John Henderson cited Brailsford’s *The Russian Workers’ Republic* in support of his argument on “Moscow and the SLP.”

Nevertheless, suspicion of “intellectuals” manifested itself from time to time. “We of the working class have nothing to thank Messieurs les Intellectuals for,” wrote one regular contributor, Jay Hen, in 1920. “They have ever attempted to deflect us into the Serbionian Bogs of Reformism.” And in November 1921, Henderson — who at various times held the positions of national secretary of the SLP and
editor of *The Socialist*, as well as secretary of the Industrial Unionist Groups in the Amalgamated Engineering Union — dismissed guild socialism as an attempt to create “a ‘safety valve’ for those ‘social superiors’ of the workers, namely the intellectual middle-class whose theory of ‘rent of ability’ has now led them to forsake the propagation of State Capitalism, and to consider how to compromise with the ever-growing advocacy of Industrial Administration by the workers for the workers.” This statement appeared in a review of G.D.H. Cole’s *Workers’ Control* pamphlets. The following week, in a contribution titled “A Critical Examination of Guild Socialism,” Henderson concluded that the movement would result in a state of affairs where “instead of keeping up Capitalist masters, the workers, by the surplus wealth they produce, will keep up an intellectual despotism.”

But not all contemporary “intellectual” currents were dismissed in such a wholesale way. In 1921, D.J. Williams, reviewing the Plebs League’s cheap edition of the Pauls’ *Creative Revolution*, applauded the attempt to “apply the new Freudian psychology to the practice of mass action. Psycho-analysis does for psychology what the materialist conception of the study of history did for the study of history.” The Pauls — if not Sigmund Freud — had been close to the SLP with their insistence on “ergatocracy.” But *The Socialist* often had positive things to say about ideas from sources far more distant, even remote, from the party.

In 1918, *The Socialist* carried a largely favourable review of J.A. Hobson’s *Democracy After the War*. Hobson’s presentation of the problems with the parliamentary system were, the reviewer said, “brilliantly worked out.” However, not being a “Marxist Socialist,” Hobson came to grief when it came to solutions. Even the proportional representation advocate J. Humphreys’s *Electoral Reform* was not ignored, its reviewer noting that “in political democracy proportional representation is certainly the ideal method of voting and is undoubtedly the most democratic,” albeit adding that in view of the imminence of the infinitely more democratic “industrial republic” there was no point in tinkering with the current electoral system. A brief notice of Walter Citrine’s *British Bolsheviks?*
The Labour Chairman, published by the Labour Publishing Company, concluded: “May it help to aid the efficiency of the movement.”

Literary figures such as Jack London and, more surprisingly, George Eliot were occasionally recommended to readers. Such authors could be attacked, too, when they had the temerity to venture into what the SLP regarded as its own territory. In 1920, Jay Hen mocked “Mr ‘Hilarious’ Belloc, the Intellectual Harlot,” while the following year, another regular contributor to The Socialist, Tom Anderson, urged, much more gently, “Think it over, my dear Belloc,” and concluded: “I admire your ‘Hills and Sea’ but in politics and religion you are out of it entirely.” Yet the phrase “servile state,” which originated from the book of that name by the non-socialist Hilaire Belloc, was just as likely to appear in the pages of The Socialist as in other left-wing publications and was used in an editorial as late as September 1921.

Nor was the SLP as isolated from other parts of the Left — at least when real threats loomed — as its “Calvinistic” reputation might suggest. When one of its Birmingham members, William Holliday, was convicted under the Defence of the Real Act (DORA) in 1916 as a result of his anti-war speeches in the Bull Ring, The Socialist set up an appeal fund. Donations included contributions from ILP and BSP branches, the Bristol Socialist Sunday School, and the Glasgow Clarion Scouts.

This was not a one-way street. However much distaste the SLP had for other socialist organizations, it always rallied to their support when they in turn were threatened by suppression. Admittedly, this could be done very back-handedly, as it was in the issue of January 1918: “As consistent opponents of certain melancholy and nebulous theories scraped together and called Guild Socialism we wish to record our protest against the attempt to suppress their meetings in London. The S.L.P. believes in free speech for everybody, because only thereby can we consistently claim the liberty of free discussion ourselves.” Not, we may note, an attitude to free speech that would normally be characterized as “Bolshevik.”

The formation of the CPGB was followed by what the SLP perceived as a vicious and unprincipled attack on its own organization by the new party. When, in February 1921, it was reported that CP...
branches were not allowed to sell the SLP paper, The Socialist referred to a report in the Workers’ Dreadnought “that a sinister resolution was put forward at the Leeds Unity Conference, to the effect ‘that nothing but official literature should be handled and sold by the members of the Communist Party.’” In contrast, it claimed, “in the central shop of the S.L.P. and any one of our branches, one may purchase ‘The Worker,’ ‘Workers’ Dreadnought,’ ‘Communist,’ ‘Plebs’ and last but by no means least the ‘Socialist’ along with other revolutionary literature.” There were limits, however: “Only we must protect the workers against reformist stuff.” But there was no suggestion that such “protection” should extend beyond failing to sell ILP and other “reformist” publications. As Challinor says of the Communist ban, this was “a new departure in British politics.” Again, it marks another way in which the SLP seems more “old-style British Left” than “new Bolshevik.” Two years later, admittedly in a context where the paper was struggling to survive, The Socialist carried advertisements for the Workers’ Dreadnought, Plebs, and The Worker. Even though such ideas did not entirely correspond to the position of the SLP, the ad for the Dreadnought proclaimed: “For Pure Communism. No Parliamentarism. One Industrial Union of Workshop Committees.”

“Jokes and funny stories may serve some purpose but do not serve the purpose of the Revolution,” a “Management Announcement” concerning the future of the paper solemnly declared in August 1921, thus reinforcing the image of the SLP as an organization composed exclusively of dour, humourless dogmatists. Yet just over a month later there appeared on the same page of The Socialist “A Story About a Story” and “Dan Dusty’s Jemmy.” The attempt, in 1922, to attract the younger generation by means of a “Children’s Corner” in the paper, with stories such as “Papuans, Ploughs and Proletarians” and “The Squire, the Robin and the Boy” by “Uncle Tom,” does not have to be read as a sign of un-Calvinistic levity; taken in conjunction with the SLP’s Sunday schools, it could be seen as quite the reverse. But even in 1923 there still seem to have been members whose levity was suspect in the minds of the more austere.

British Bolsheviks?
The founder of the Young Marxian Schools for Proletarian Education, Tom Mitchell, had been at various times national secretary of the SLP and editor of The Socialist and was now managing secretary of the Socialist Labour Press. In a July 1923 piece devoted to congratulating the Glasgow SLP in particular and the party in general on eluding the wiles of “the ‘unity at any price’ fellows,” he detected “yet another element of extraneous matter” in the party: “I refer to the social element, that section of the working class, who, willy nilly find themselves within the revolutionary movement, a class of people who mistake Socialism for Social and who endeavour to make a Socialist club a purely social club.”

Nor, in spite of its self-perceived role as the exclusive repository of revolutionary truth, was the SLP immune from the suspicion of the very notion of “leaders” or “leadership” that was so common elsewhere on the pre-Leninist Left in Britain. W.R. Stoker’s opening address, as he chaired the 1915 SLP conference, had concluded: “So long as the workers put their trust in leaders — as the term is understood today — so long will they be led astray.” Granted, the qualification in the middle of his remark might be seen as an “escape clause,” but, all the same, Stoker continued: “The workers by the power of their organisations must emancipate themselves, they alone can do it.” And on the centenary of Marx’s birth in 1918 an editorial titled “Hero Worship” proclaimed: “The S.L.P. is not a band of hero-worshipers. We do not believe in ‘Leaders.’”

This attitude was not something that faded as the Bolshevik stress on “correct” leadership and the “vanguard party” came more to the fore elsewhere. At the beginning of 1922, for example, in its 5 January issue, The Socialist included an “Industrial News” supplement that featured adamant opposition to paying trade union officials higher wages than the members they were supposed to represent. The working class needed to guard against the setting up of a labour bureaucracy. The piece concluded that the creation of such a social group constituted “a real danger to the working class — the placing between itself and the capitalist class of an ORGANISED body of PROFESSIONAL LEADERS or ‘negotiators.’” This could easily have come from the pen of one of the supporters of the Clarion trade union
scheme, which had briefly been realized in the form of the National and International General Federation of Trade and Labour Unions a quarter of a century previously. And the aspiration (quoted earlier) of the scheme’s promoter, P.J. King, who, in 1898, wished to see the end of “a few well-paid and well-groomed officials” thwarting the wishes of the members that elected and paid them, would have chimed happily enough with the attitude of The Socialist in the 1920s.25

As regards the conduct of its own affairs, the SLP was always insistent on the reality of its internal democracy. At the time of the CUG breakaway and the expulsion of Bell, MacManus, and Paul, branches were urged to strengthen the hand of the executive by resolutions of support and were exhorted — with the use of the boldface type that The Socialist favoured for emphasis — “Remember that you, the rank and file, can turn out your officials at any time should you desire.” Just before this, when the issue of unity seemed likely to cause problems at the party’s 1921 conference, The Socialist declined to attempt to influence the outcome, insisting that “the S.L.P. is a rank and file organisation almost to the point of detail,” while its editorial declared: “In the name of the principles of Communism we support whole-heartedly the agitation for free speech and a free press.”26 The decisions of the 1921 conference were confirmed by a referendum of members, as seems to have been the normal practice.27

The SLP was insistent on the openness and transparency of its activities. When a branch officer’s home was raided in search of “Bolshevik Gold,” The Socialist, having remarked that “the secretary wishes to heavens that he had gold of any kind,” asserted that “everything in the S.L.P. is above board and can bear the light of day. The S.L.P. is no hole-and-corner band of conspirators but an organisation of Class Conscious Working Men and Women.” All information about the party was readily available from the National Secretary at 50 Renfrew Street, Glasgow. “When applying,” the paper added, “state whether [it’s] Mr, Mrs, Lieutenant, Sergeant or just plain ‘Bobby’ trying to ‘get on.’”28

There is much, then, that tends to modify the image of the SLP as the sectarian body of the British Left par excellence. At the same time,
it would be just as misleading to conclude that the SLP was — contrary to its usual image — consistently devoted to internal democracy, free speech, and transparency. Challinor mentions, as a noteworthy SLP activist, Sean McLoughlin, who had previously participated in the Easter Rising and subsequently joined the Socialist party of Ireland before coming to Britain, but he fails to note McLoughlin’s eventual fate in the SLP. McLoughlin contributed at least one article to *The Socialist* (“Bourgeois Dictatorship,” 1 July 1920) and made tours giving talks to branches. On 8 September 1921, the Leeds branch enthusiastically reported in *The Socialist* that McLoughlin was staying with them for a full week and giving six lectures. And yet the very next week, on 15 September, the following notice appeared: “To whom it May Concern. Sean McLoughlin is not now a member of the Socialist Labour Party, having been expelled by the N.E.C. on September 10th 1921.” No further explanation was forthcoming — at least not in the pages of *The Socialist*.

The expulsion may have been amply justified, but the absence of any explanation in the party’s weekly paper seems to cohabit uncomfortably with the SLP’s declared commitments to openness and democracy. As we shall see a little later, the expulsion of an even more prominent member of the party at the end of 1922 was dealt with in an identical fashion.

**Parliament and the Labour Party**

While the sticking point regarding unity for the CP (BST1) before 1921 had been participation in parliamentary politics, for the SLP it was affiliation to the Labour Party. In the run-up to the 1918 election, William Paul, a future defector to the CP via the CUG, stressed that the SLP was “not a parliamentary party.” According to him, the SLP believed in contesting parliamentary elections “only as a means of sweeping away all the antiquated institutions that stand in the way of the industrial union controlling the means of production.”

The SLP stressed that its position in no way resembled that of the “reformist” organizations. In contrast to the ILP and the BSP, the SLP was “not a parliamentary organisation,” *The Socialist* insisted at the end
of January 1919, and it would not, therefore, “swallow its revolutionary principles by being affiliated to the Labour Party.” A week later, Margaret Watt, who seems to have been one of the few female SLP members at this time and was certainly one of the few women to contribute to the paper, claimed that the SLP was the first British socialist party to “direct the attention of the working-class to the impossibility of achieving the social revolution through Parliament.” Its candidates participated in elections “for the deliberate purpose of revolutionary agitation and with the intention of seeking to destroy the Parliamentary institution.”

The SLP always declared itself heartily in favour of “unity”—but not if it entailed Labour Party affiliation. “The time has come,” The Socialist proclaimed on May Day 1919, “for those who are not obsessed with the constitutionalism of bourgeois Parliamentarism to withdraw from the Labour Party once and for all.” Labour Party affiliation would put the SLP in a “false position,” it reiterated the following year. And, on 1 September 1921, The Socialist announced that “the Labour Party reflects the interests of the auctioneers of the Working Class, whose economic domain is the Trade Union Movement.”

Throughout the BSP-led unity negotiations and subsequently, its total opposition to Labour Party affiliation kept the SLP from making any agreement to merge its forces. At a meeting on 13 March 1920, Thomas Mitchell, the SLP’s national secretary, stressed again that the party “could never agree to sink the identity of the Revolutionary movement in any compromise with Social-Patriots such as the Labour Party.” The SLP would agree to unity only if the BSP dropped the idea of Labour affiliation altogether. The prospects were to be no better from the SLP’s standpoint after the CPGB was formed. In the issue of 3 March 1921, a Socialist editorial titled “The Futility of Parliament” deplored Labour as having “no class war basis”:

Yet the vain, self-important Communists talk about helping the Labour Party into power in order to prove its uselessness, and then the masses will swing over to them! To them indeed. To whom, may we ask? To men, who have not the courage of their own convictions?

*British Bolsheviks?*
The Communist Unity Group and the “Unity Gag”: The SLP Declines to Unite

In the early part of 1920, with the protracted negotiations that eventually led to the formation of the Communist Party still not seeming to offer many signs of progress, Tom Bell, Arthur MacManus, and William Paul, who had earlier acted as SLP negotiators for unity, formed their own faction: the Communist Unity Group (CUG). The CUG then proceeded to hold a conference in Nottingham at the same time that the SLP conference was taking place in Carlisle. The Socialist responded with a predictable mixture of anger and dismissiveness. A third of those attending the breakaway conference, said its “Headquarter Notes,” had no connection with the SLP at all and were in fact “guests of those who wish to disrupt the S.L.P. and make it a Party of compromise.” In the same issue, which stressed the party’s willingness to negotiate with others to achieve what it called “Revolutionary Unity,” the rather oddly titled “Random Reflections on the Carlisle Conference,” by Jay Hen, reported:

The “late Unity Committee” might have been discredited by its self-imposed absence from the Conference. In this connection the Rochdale delegate in reporting that he was deputising for a member of his branch who was attending a “conference” at Nottingham presumably called by the “Unity Committee” created a painful sensation.34

Bell, MacManus, and Paul were duly expelled from the SLP. The Socialist published messages of support from branches but also reported ones that resolved to “take no action” or, in the case of the Birkenhead branch, to offer “support for the unofficial manifesto” of the CUG. Mitchell, explaining the SLP’s rejection of an invitation to take part in another “Communist Unity” meeting at which the CUG was represented, referred to the expulsions and expressed surprise that, at the projected meeting, “the three persons mentioned had equal voting rights with a National Organisation such as the B.S.P.”35 Like Sylvia Pankhurst and her comrades, the SLP was heartened by the fleeting appearance of Third International support for their position. The editor
of *The Socialist* put in bold the statement of the ill-fated Amsterdam Sub-Bureau urging “English comrades” to unite on the basis of opposing Labour Party affiliation.36

At the beginning of July 1920, under the heading “The Unity Gag: What a Game!” *The Socialist* published a disdainful assessment of the attempts to achieve Communist unity. Signed “T.E.,” it began: “After eighteen months [of] useless palavering, after a mountain of labour a mouse has come forth.” Pankhurst had started a Communist Party “with the help of a few Anarchist and Anti-Parliamentary elements.” But “knowing her fundamental instability and erratic character,” the SLP had turned a deaf ear. Pankhurst had “jumped the claim,” leaving the BSP and CUG “in a devil of a fix.” After a lengthy account of the unity negotiations, and after prophesying that the BSP would “pack the rank and file Convention on August 1st to carry the affiliation to the Labour Party clause,” the article concluded that this protracted search for unity might result in the creation of three separate Communist parties. There might be Pankhurst’s anti-parliamentary Communist Party, the South Wales Communist Unity Council might form a “Parliamentary Communist Party,” and the BSP and CUG might together create a “Labour Party Communist Party.” If, as seemed likely, the Left Wing of the ILP joined the latter, this would “only weaken still further the proposed new party.”37

But, as would soon become evident, there was much more that kept the SLP from uniting with the Communists than simply the question of Labour Party affiliation, crucial though that was.

**The Third International and the 21 Conditions**

As members of the SLP saw it, the British Communists were responsible for misleading Lenin about Britain. The result was the attempt to impose the inappropriate “21 conditions” of the Third International and all that went with them. At the time of the Leeds Unity Conference early in 1921, *The Socialist* published a letter explaining the non-attendance of “our comrades” of the British Section, International Socialist Labour Party — another small Left grouping founded, according to the letter’s signatory, its national secretary.
Louis Gordon, in 1912. “We had neither a voice nor a vote in the framing of the 21 points” Gordon complained, and the “tactics of the Thesis were inapplicable to the conditions obtainable in this country.” In Britain, “a measure of freedom,” which allowed the open advocacy of socialism, prevented “the possibility of police spies and agents provocateurs doing the work of the capitalist class.”

As we saw earlier, the party regarded itself as part of the Third International and, in the summer of 1921, duly sent James Clunie as its representative to the Third Congress of that body. He went with the intention of presenting the case of the SLP on Labour Party affiliation and other issues, only to find that the credential committee rejected him “because we had failed to obey the instruction to join up with the Communist Party.” But there were “certain tactics stipulated in the thesis and statutes of that Congress” that the SLP “did not approve” and consequently “it was impossible for us to agree with the 21 conditions entirely.” Clunie was not even allowed to attend as a “fraternal delegate” but only as a guest.

His lengthy report was published in instalments over a period of over two months and then as a six-penny pamphlet, The Third Communist International: Its Aims and Methods.

Clunie’s report pinpointed the policy positions and practices unacceptable to the SLP. The Communist Party’s industrial policy entailed “the formation of Communist nuclei within the trade unions,” whose function was to propagate Communist principles. These were “simply political weapons for the achievement of political power” subordinated to the Communist Party. This subordination of “the industrial factor” to “the political faction” was quite the reverse of the SLP position. Logically, it “excluded the cardinal point of industrial unionism which holds to the prime need for control within the workshops.” Concluding his report, Clunie summarized his party’s position: it aimed at working-class unity and economic control, revolutionary political action to “foment and register this,” working-class education, and independence from reformism. And he included a passage that came about as near as anything that ever appeared in The Socialist to criticism of the
Bolshevik regime itself. The Bolsheviks’ “New Economic Policy” was seen simply as the beginning of a return to capitalism:

In Russia there is no Communism and the people are not Communists and for many reasons the political dictatorship, necessary as it may have been up to now, has been undermined because of the poverised condition of economic resources and means of production. With the growth of Capitalism in Russia, the proletariat will be drawn more and more to study revolutionary progress from the industrial side. These things point to the absurdity of the Third International imposing its psychological outlook upon the rest of the countries whose conditions dictate otherwise.

The fault did not lie with Lenin, however, who had been ill advised and misled by British Communists. In contrast to the pages of the later Workers’ Dreadnought, where disillusion and criticism gradually but increasingly manifested themselves in the early 1920s, Lenin’s reputation in The Socialist remained unsullied right up until his death, which was reported on the front page of the very last issue of the paper, that of February 1924. Indeed, it seemed that, belatedly, Lenin had become aware of what the SLP had been saying all along.

In March 1923, Henderson cited Lenin’s speech, “Five Years of the Russian Revolution,” delivered at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, in support of the Socialist Labour position. The “21 points,” Lenin was quoted as saying (with The Socialist’s usual boldface for emphasis) were “Russian through and through. Should some exceptional foreigner master the meaning of our resolution he would find himself incapable of carrying it out.” Two months earlier, the paper had castigated a once prominent SLP member who had passed through the party on his way from the syndicalism of his Workers’ Committee pamphlet to the Communist Party: “Mr J.T. Murphy, like many other ex S.L.Pers, got ‘drunk’ with revolutionary romanticism after having waded through many fine but altogether unnecessary Russian pamphlets on theses and statutes which are now reckoned by Lenin as being useless and unfitting for the people of the western part of the world.”
The SLP and the Soviets: A Changing Emphasis

The SLP shared the positive view of the Russian soviets that was so widespread on the British Left, as we have already seen in the party’s response to the suppression of the Constituent Assembly. “Government by the Soviets,” said *The Socialist* on 13 March 1919, “representing directly in committee, the industrial and social affairs of the common people and reaching the remotest hamlet is a challenge to the class rule of capitalism.” And as the paper’s editorial on the Easter conference in 1919 put it:

To the bourgeoisie the unpardonable crime of Revolutionary Socialism in action has been the levity with which the Parliamentary machinery has been treated. In Russia and Hungary, in particular, the National Assemblies have been swept aside to make way for the more proletarian machinery of Soviets or committees, which places complete power in the hands of the masses.44

Shortly afterwards, in a piece titled “Let Us Be Communists” that appeared in the 22 May issue, Fred Sylvester explained: “As the Soviets were from the first democratic organisations of soldiers, workers and peasants . . . they are now the unit of the Russian Socialist Republic — the complete expression of the revolutionary movement.” And later in the year, in the course of reviewing Ramsay MacDonald’s *Parliament and Revolution*, “E.S.” presented the usual idealized view of the democratic superiority of the soviet over the parliamentary system:

A monthly meeting of a Workers’ Committee which receives a report of its delegate’s activity, considers his recommendations, and instructs his further activity, is more likely to be an institution productive of intelligent membership than an electorate dragooned, cajoled or exhorted once in four, three or one years.45

So far, so familiar. But, even during its most “soviet” phase, the SLP was less keen than other enthusiasts for soviet democracy to use the Russian nomenclature. The August 1920 version of the “Platform of the Socialist Labour Party” sketched the “the Communist form
of organisation,” regarded as “essential for Socialist Communism,” as being “dual in character — i.e. industrial and residential.” The basic unit would be the “Workshop or Yard Committee,” which would send delegates to and be “co-ordinated by the formation of Works or Plant Committees.” These would then be represented on the (more familiarly named) Workers’ Council, which would also have delegates from the “Residential or Ward Committee, the unit of organisation at the point of residence.” The “residential” electorate would consist “only of those who render service to the community.” At regional and national levels there would be “Regional or National Administrative Committees.” This describes a structure very like other models of ideal soviet democracy but, significantly, with more “British”-sounding titles.46

That there might be a good deal more to this than mere choice of vocabulary became clear in 1921, when there was a self-conscious reassertion of the party’s De Leonist origins. That March, a very long letter from David Sherriff, secretary of the Glasgow branch, urged a return to “Industrial Unionism as laid down by the Workers’ International Industrial Union and spoken to by Daniel De Leon in July 1905.” According to Sherriff, during the war “the Anarchist tendency composed of that element known as the ‘prominent members’” had gained ground within the SLP. The April 1918 conference had “buried” the 1905 platform, “despite the fact that the conditions of production here are no more like those of Russia than night is like day.” Sherriff’s letter ended with the uncompromising claim that “Daniel De Leon, of the Socialist Labour Party, was the real founder of the Third International, not Moscow.”47 And, early in 1922, noting the “decision of the Bolshevik Government to revert to a Capitalistic form of industry,” the ever-astringent Jay Hen poured scorn on the “parroting of Russian phraseology, and attempts to popularise the Soviet form of government in a country which has long passed the stage when this political form was either possible or desirable.”48
The Revival of De Leonism: The “Industrial Republic” and the WIIU

If The Socialist avoided overuse of “Russian phraseology,” it is noticeable that, from 1921 onwards, there was a resurgence in the paper of the De Leonist equivalent. In several of the issues in the early weeks of 1922 alone, we find expressions such as “taking and holding,” “Labour Fakirs” (and the variant used to characterize Communists and their sympathisers: “Marxian Labour Fakirs”), “boring from within,” and “pure and simple trades unions.” References to De Leon also became more frequent again, usually in contexts intended to underscore his impeccable Marxist credentials, his appreciation by Lenin, and his continued relevance: “Lenin, a really great man, a man at whose feet one would have pleasure in learning, paid a lasting tribute to the work of De Leon as being the greatest contribution to Socialist thought since Marx.”

The SLP was, contended the “Platform of the Socialist Labour Party” at the beginning of 1923, “the only political party in this country that blazes the trail to the Workers’ Industrial Republic.” There was now, significantly, no mention of “residential” organization:

In place of the Capitalist system the Socialist Labour Party aims to substitute a system of social ownership of the means of production, industrially administered, by the workers, who assume control and direction as well as operation of their industrial affairs.

We, therefore, call upon the wage-workers to organise themselves into a revolutionary party under the banner of the S.L.P., and to organise themselves likewise upon the industrial field into a Socialist Industrial Union, as now exemplified by the Workers’ International Industrial Union, in keeping with their political aims, and we call upon all other intelligent citizens to place themselves squarely upon the ground of working class interest and join us in this mighty and noble work.

The Workers’ International Industrial Union (WIIU), which is not mentioned in Challinor’s Origins of British Bolshevism (though its predecessor is), had emerged from the Advocates of Industrial Unionism,
a body open to non-SLPers that went back to the early pre-war days of the party.\textsuperscript{54} Industrial unionism was the De Leonist version of, or alternative to, soviets — without peasants, soldiers, or, most significantly, direct representatives of political parties. The WIIU revival had much to do with attempting to counter the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), organized by the Communists internationally, and the Workers’ Committee Movement, which, Challinor says, “had degenerated into a CP-dominated rump” by this time.\textsuperscript{55} The WIIU began to be brought to the fore again towards the end of 1921, with reports and articles about it appearing in \textit{The Socialist}.\textsuperscript{55}

Early in January 1922, as the Sheffield SLP announced the formation of a WIIU group — one sign of the revival — its relationship with the party was becoming the subject of controversy. Throughout January and February, the issue was debated in the paper under the title “The Problem of Policy,” the chief protagonists being John Henderson, who had made a hostile “critique” of the RIlu in December, and his adversary, Willie Allan.\textsuperscript{54} An issue of \textit{The Industrial News} — the organ of the impressively titled Shipbuilding and Engineering Trade Group of the Workers’ International Industrial Union and said to be regularly available in no less than sixteen named locations throughout Britain — was published as a supplement to the 5 January edition of \textit{The Socialist}. The following week, Allan complained that, even though Henderson and others acted and spoke as though it were, “the W.I.I.U. is not the S.L.P.” An editorial note to Allan’s letter invited further contributions from readers on “the question of an industrial and political policy,” a process that the paper hoped would continue until the Easter conference in order to enable the Party to “openly thrash out the problems of party policy.”\textsuperscript{55}

Allan favoured participation in the National Workers’ Committee (NWC) movement. He presented the choice between the NWC and the WIIU as one of viability: “The N.W.C. policy is practicable. The W.I.I.U. is impossible, both from the point of view of Dubb, who is afraid of losing his funeral benefits, and of the Socialist who does not see the need for a duplication of organisation.”\textsuperscript{56} Judging from the

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correspondence in the paper, Allan was not alone in taking this view. But the SLP as a whole was with Henderson. It was, however, much more than a question of which form of organization was the more practical — or perhaps we should say the less impracticable.

For Henderson there were three “cardinal points.” The first was “class struggle,” with its aim of overthrowing “the political state.” Second was the successful establishment of the Socialist Industrial Republic, which, he said, implies “Industrial Administration, and which accordingly implies Industry as the Governmental constituency.” Third, there was “the One-ness of the Proletariat” and the organizing of workers on the political as well as on the economic field:

Taking that position prevents anyone — logically — from working in harmony with, say, the Workers’ Committee Movement which aims at “The overthrow of Capitalism, and the setting up of a workers’ dictatorship under which a system of workers’ control and management of industry shall be developed.”

It should be recognised that Socialist Industrial Unionism is not a “post-revolutionary” machine, but a necessary requisite to the accomplishing of the Social Revolution here, in Great Britain where the proletariat, in contradistinction to Russia, is the greatest portion of the population.57

How “Bolshevik” was an SLP that, committed to something very like soviet democracy, albeit in the form of “Industrial Unionism” and the “Industrial Republic,” rejected the dictatorship of the proletariat? As Henderson had written a few weeks earlier: “Unity at the top can only proceed from unity at the bottom. In this country the proletariat constitutes a majority of the population. When they assume power it is the rule of the majority. Dictatorship of the Proletariat is a nonsensical term in relation to conditions here.”58

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat and “Civilised” Conflict
The key words in Henderson’s statement are the final five: “in relation to conditions here.” This was not a rejection of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the Bolsheviks role in Russia: “Whatever we may say
regarding the Communists in this country, the Russian Communists are earnestly and modestly striving to see World Communism established,” declared The Socialist on 22 September 1921. A few months later, an editorial note affirmed: “We have always insisted and shall continue to emphasise the fact that our duty as revolutionaries is to study the struggle in Russia in the perspective of Russian circumstances and to stand by her in her struggle against World Capitalism.” The blame for the concessions and retreats forced on the Bolsheviks was laid, by William Leslie in 1922, at the door of “the disorganised Proletariat of the advanced countries who were unable to seize economic and political power during the last four years.”

It was the absence of “a European or World Proletarian Revolution” that had determined events in Russia. In the view of The Socialist, the results were predictable:

We Marxians know that the Dictatorship of the Proletariat — the wielding of the Political State as a Proletarian State followed (as night does day) in Russia in conformity with the political and economic requirements of that country — it could not have been otherwise. The industrial proletariat was the advance-guard, the revolutionary class, but it was a feeble minority and lacked the material basis for the realisation.

In Britain, the main culprit for the country’s failure to come to the aid of the Russian Revolution was, of course, the Communist Party. “Where are the mighty to-day?” Tom Mitchell asked rhetorically in the issue of September 1923: “The mighty who betrayed our Russian Comrades in the first years of the Bolshevik revolution. The mighty who carried such glowing, but false reports about the strength of the revolutionary movement in this country in general and the mighty strength of the C.P.G.B. in particular.”

The previous year, during the “Problem of Policy” controversy, Henderson, touching on the issue of the dictatorship of the proletariat, had complained that too many on the Left had their “feet in Great Britain, but their heads in Russia.” A few weeks earlier, in a long piece titled “The Foundations of Revolutionary Activity,” Jay Hen
dismissed “talk of controlling the State, through the ‘Dictatorship of the Proletariat,’” which was “being indulged in by people calling themselves ‘Marxists.’” Apparently, he complained, “the ability to memorise a number of rather ponderous phrases is considered a sufficient qualification, in some quarters, to justify self-investment with this title.” In Britain, the proletariat was “by far the greatest numerical section of the population, and, assuming a real revolutionary situation reached, with the workers organised industrially, and actually in possession of the workshops and factories, dictatorship is resolved into the familiar ‘majority rule’ on an occupational, instead of a geographical basis.”

Hin objected to the use made of quotations from Marx concerning both the dictatorship of the proletariat and the withering away of the state by “colorature Bolsheviks,” who spent so much time memorizing the words of Marx, Lenin and other “notable thinkers” that they had “none to spare for an intelligent use of the theoretical matter of either Marx or anyone else.” He went on:

The plain fact of the matter is that no such extended period of unstable social equilibrium (with society poised on the knife edge of class strife) is possible in a country where capital has advanced to the high composition it has with us, and where, as a necessary corollary, the State has perfected its functions of oppression — both psychological and physical to the utmost.

We shall have to kill the State, break it up, and scatter it to the four winds. What is needed is the extension of the functions of society, organised industrially, to every field of social activity, politics included.  

For the SLP, the advocates of the dictatorship of the proletariat as applied to Britain and similar economically developed “western” countries were simply, and often wilfully, misinterpreting Marx and Marxism.

David Sherriff had been typically disparaging about the CP in the summer of 1921, after press reports of violence in Sheffield, where there had been baton charges against a demonstration by the unemployed “who are popularly associated with the Communist Party.” He
presented this as a “stupendous attempt in Sheffield to establish the Dictatorship of the Proletariat! Rant and Riot, window smashing and nonsensical words.” The time had come for the SLP to wage vigorous war against “this treason to the Proletariat.” The incident revealed how capable the CP was of leading the proletariat — “to damnation and massacre.” It was up to the SLP to show the workers how to organize themselves as an industrial union capable of taking economic power and carrying on production “for the whole of society.” The party had, furthermore, to show that

Peace and Order is implied in such actions and that the Political Party at the Polls must register approximately the strength of the revolutionary Movement; that discipline is essential to the result of the Polls; if the majority decide in favour of wage-slavery then the power is in the hands of those who have most to gain from such a system; they enforce its conditions upon the whole of society; the Party of the Workers must carry on and try again — time is always with it. If it triumph at the Polls, i.e. gains the majority, it has the power the power implied in the industrial union of the workers to destroy the “robber burg” of Capitalism; to declare wage-slavery no more.

The phrase “civilised methods” was acquiring a deeper meaning for the SLP, concluded Sherriff. It implied carrying out the necessary education and developing the strategy and tactics capable of conquering not only the petty, old-fashioned barbarism of fisticuffs, hay-forks, and pocket pistols; the barbarism that is lingering in the minds of our pitiable burlesque bolsheviki, but, moreover, that will know how to make powerless and ineffectual the revised and improved barbarism of the modern Field of Mars. Education and organisation, not rant and riot, is the necessity of the hour.\(^3\)

For Sherriff, the SLP’s policy of encouraging workers to participate “in all forms of activity” in existing unions while also presenting craft-unionism as “pro-capitalist” was contradictory. Trade unionism was a diversion, he insisted in a letter to the paper in July 1921. He wanted

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to see the “working-class marching in a direct line to their emancipation,” and to accomplish this “social peace must be their war cry.”

Only industrial unionism as represented by the W.I.I.U. would succeed:

The W.I.I.U. places itself on the principle of a **peaceful solution** of the organisation of the workers around the tools of production to take and hold these means by and for Society. **Its method is to keep the ruling Class to the Civilized, i.e. the Peaceful method of settling disputes; to test the strength of the Industrial Organisation of the Workers and take and hold by the easy method of counting votes.**

For the following two weeks, *The Socialist* gave front-page prominence to articles by Sherriff titled “To Prevent Strikes” and “Trade Unionism and ‘Peaceful Submission.’” It was futile to expect anything but defeat from a “Trade Union strike” when market conditions were against the workers. They should “keep focussed” on socialism rather than frittering away energy “by fighting incidentals.” Organized as a class in one union, they should “take and hold all the means of production, distribution and exchange and to administer these things for the whole Society.” Politically, “as a means of endeavouring to accomplish by **peaceful methods** the abolition of wage-slavery,” they should “endeavour to solve by means of the vote, by disciplined submission to majority rule, the burning question of the time.”

Building “Socialist Industrial Unionism” might be difficult, but it was the correct way forward, as opposed to the “Civil War stunt” advocated by the Communists. “We live in a Political society, in Civilised Society,” *The Socialist* insisted. And, in bold uppercase letters, it laid down its position unequivocally:

CIVILISATION IMPLIES ORDER
NO DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT CAN SOLVE THE SOCIAL PROBLEM

The latter was, it declared, “a historical and social impossibility in these days.” The capitalist system continued, and the capitalist class ruled “by the consent of the vast majority which is the Proletariat.”
Only when this majority awoke to its real position and organized itself as an industrial union could this situation be changed.

In February 1922, with the shop stewards’ movement, its membership much dwindled, now merging with the CP, *The Socialist* devoted two whole pages to a response to an article in *The Worker*, the shop stewards’ movement’s northern organ. Written by J.R. Campbell, who now chaired the organization, the piece summarized his position as advocating the necessity of “a working class dictatorship” resulting from “a physical force struggle.” The SLP’s “belief in the possibility of a peaceful Revolution” was, according to Campbell, “a monstrous and dangerous delusion.” This, said *The Socialist*, was “the negation of revolutionary principles and a menace to the working class.” Who, it asked, would “wield the dictatorship” in the absence of “a proletariat which is not sufficiently conscious to adopt civilised methods of establishing its power?” What “guarantee of protection” would there be for “an industrial proletariat, which is too weak to protect itself?”

As “ordinary proletarians,” the SLP believed in an “open platform and frank discussion”:

> If we cannot discuss our ideas in the light of day, before the masses, which must vindicate the realisation of our views, then we have no right to hold such ideas. . . . The establishment of Socialism is not possible with hush-hush-here-comes-the-policeman-hide-the-plans methods. No, no, we have had enough of that kind of stuff recently.

We would like to impress on Campbell that Marx nowhere, to our knowledge, gives any reason to believe that he believed in dictatorship, physical force, and political revolution, in Great Britain, as those ideas find expression in his article, or as presently expressed by certain persons who insult the memory of Marx by calling themselves Marxists.

The SLP was determined to maintain that it, not the CPGB and its acolytes, were the true Marxists. Writing in October 1922, P. Marsden compared the original *Communist Manifesto* with its 1872 preface. Conditions “in highly developed capitalist countries (England, the
U.S.A. and Germany for example)” were very different than they were in 1847. He quoted Engels’s “Landmarks of Scientific Socialism” to the effect that armies were now entirely dependent on “economic conditions.” To Marsden this meant that, should the ruling class attempt to use force to resist the coming revolution, “if the proletariat is organised to prevent regular supplies and unhindered transport, the capitalist armed force would become a rabble.” An 1894 Neue Zeit article by Engels (helpfully translated in Plebs, from January to April 1921) had demonstrated “the absurdity of the workers attempting to organise an armed force to put through a revolution, or, once organised, the impossibility of doing anything with it.” Marsden continued:

Now, since political dictatorship (of one class over another) is the rule of a minority over the majority, the proletarian dictatorship can exist only when the proletariat is in a minority. If the proletariat is a majority, its rule is majority rule and majority rule is not dictatorship; it is one of the principles of democracy.

So, while the dictatorship of the proletariat might be “correct in a country like Roumania or Russia,” it was “out of date” in countries such as Britain, Germany, and the United States. “In civilised society (capitalist variety especially) the methods of settling quarrels by an appeal to force (violence) is out of date. Today we recognise the peaceful method; by public speeches, by free press, by balloting, by the gaining of majorities.” How could SLP propaganda reach workers if “we advocate violence which would get us crushed”? 69

It was soon after this, in the issue of November 1922, that a brief notice, headed “To Whom It May Concern” and signed by Henderson as national secretary, appeared in The Socialist, announcing that Sherriff had been expelled from the SLP by its National Executive Committee. As with the earlier expulsion of Sean McLoughlin, no explanation was given. Whether there was a connection between Sherriff’s expulsion and any of the uncompromising views he had expressed during the previous year is not clear. But it seems unlikely that The Socialist would publish without critical comment material that the
SLP leadership objected to or that they would wait for over a year to take action. In any case, Sherriff was hardly alone in his conclusion. The emphasis might sometimes differ, but the conclusions were the same: “The Dictatorship of the Proletariat” was totally inappropriate and unnecessary in the British context.

The Nature of the Revolution and the Role of the Revolutionary Party

It must be evident by now that the position of the SLP on the nature of the anticipated British revolution and the role of the revolutionary party in it had little in common with what would be normally understood by “Bolshevik” and that, with the defection of the CUG and subsequent transfers of members to the CPGB, this became increasingly clear. In an editorial in the March 1918 issue, The Socialist had concluded:

When the political expression of revolutionary socialism captures the state it will proceed at once to use such power to enforce the will of the revolutionary proletariat. It will call upon the industrially organised workers to take over and control the industries of the country. It will use the power over the State, which includes the armed forces of the nation, to see that no capitalist counter-revolutionary movement stands in the way of the industrial unions electing their local and national administrative councils.

With its stress on the political, as distinct from the industrial, and the anteriority assumed for the capture of the state by political revolutionaries, this may possibly have been a departure from the strictest interpretation of De Leonism. But, according to a piece written in April 1919 by the future chairman of the CPGB, Arthur MacManus, the role of SLP was still to ensure that the coming revolution was a “Social and not a Political” one. At this stage the party seemed to put the stress on differentiating itself from “the hare-brained schemes of wild-eyed and lopsided Anarchists,” which it did by emphasizing that “the political and industrial organisations of the working-class” were “not antagonistic and separate, but complementary phases of the movement for Socialism.”

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The SLP’s job was to convince workers of the “necessity for Social Revolution and for converting our Party into a Ways and Means Committee to accomplish that historic task,” argued a Socialist editorial that focused on the party’s Easter conference in April 1920. Rather difficult to reconcile with its later statements concerning peaceful revolution and “civilised” methods was the paper’s call later that year, when British intervention in the Russo-Polish war seemed likely: “Let the capitalists declare their war if they dare; the workers, with rifles in their hands, will create a greater civil war at home and render their proclamation futile.”

But such bravado was very uncharacteristic of The Socialist.

If there was to be a revolution, it would have to be the work of the workers themselves. The SLP’s role was to show the way. It would accomplish this by preserving the correct, De Leonist, version of Marxism, by propagating the classics of the faith, and by educating the working class and encouraging it to organize itself into one big industrial union willing and able to challenge capitalism at the point of production. At the same time, the growing revolutionary consciousness that made this challenge possible would be registered by workers voting for, and eventually electing, revolutionary socialist candidates. But the real protagonists of the revolution had to be the workers themselves: “The organised workers must make the Revolution while the individual, and even parties, can only function more or less as units of the mass.”

As we have seen, in 1921 the focus increasingly shifted to re-emphasizing the De Leonist approach and promoting industrial unionism. In June, one correspondent, rejecting the line of the “so-called Communists,” saw the need for “a strong nucleus” to prepare for the “last struggle.” Its role would be to point out “that science not leaders, can determine the end of wage slavery.” The Socialist insisted on the need for education “on Marxist lines.” Hence the classes in industrial history and economics offered in 1921 by W. Lusty, secretary of the Coventry branch, as well as the SLP “Sunday schools” and other similar initiatives. Above all, a “Socialist Industrial Union” was vital. “Political power to the working class is essential to the accomplishment
of Socialist Revolution,” the paper argued a week later, “but political power is only effective inasmuch as it is a reflex of the economic power of the class that wields it.” It was the task of the SLP to promote this, while the CPGB, that “great monstrosity,” was “heading through Labour Party affiliation for the Servile State.”

There was no way that the revolution could be carried out without overwhelming working-class support. *The Socialist* insisted in November 1921 that what it called — rather oddly for a paper based in Scotland — “Capitalist England” could only “be changed when the wage-workers desire it, not before.” At the beginning of 1922, an article titled “The Problem of Industrial Organisation” concluded that the SLP must “show the workers a social constructive policy, which will lead them to work for their own emancipation.”

The SLP certainly saw itself as a vanguard, but it was an ideological rather than a politically directive vanguard. Those who left to join the Communists may have had a more ambiguous notion that blurred such a distinction. But those who remained faithful to their De Leonism rejected any idea that a revolutionary minority could carry out a revolution in a country like Britain. The SLP’s task was to prepare the way, not to direct the revolutionary process. As *The Socialist* put it in June 1922: “Our work is to Agitate, Educate and Organise for Socialism — nothing else.”

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