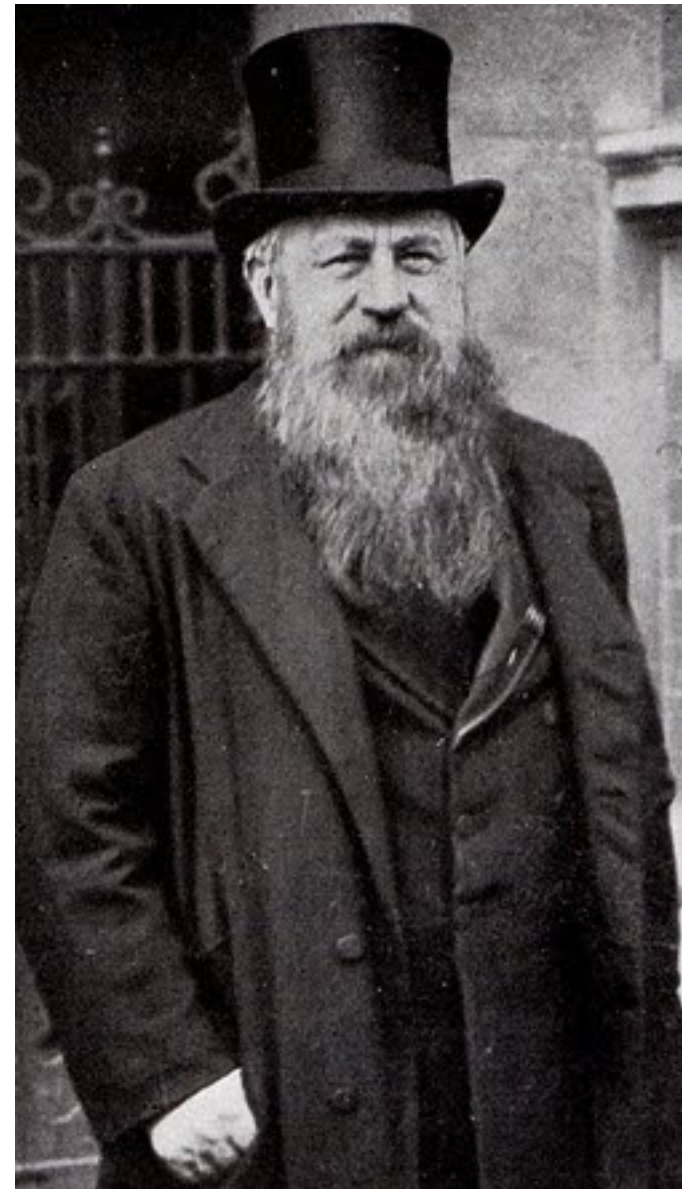
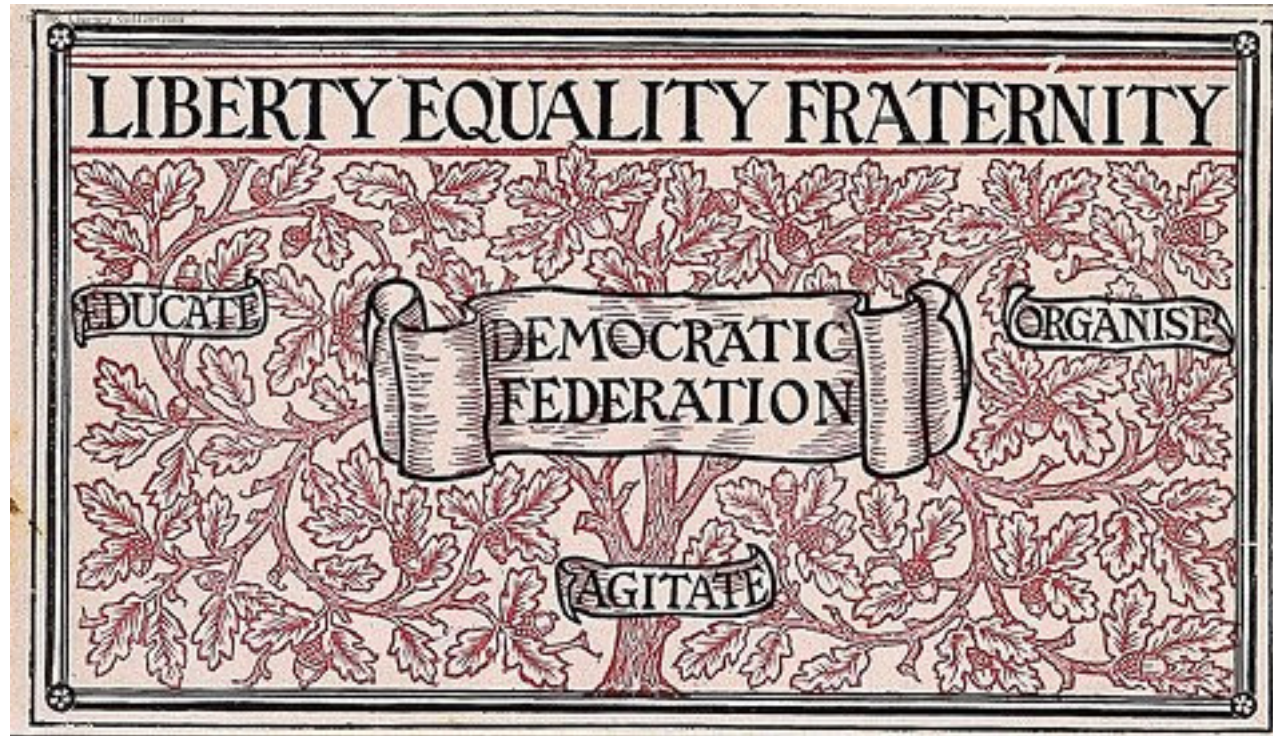


Henry Hyndman: “making socialists”

- In the early 1880s, at the age of forty, Hyndman was converted from his Tory background to socialism through reading Marx's Capital.
- Founded Britain's first Marxist group, the Social Democratic Federation (in 1883-4).
- The SDF was founded before the rise of New Unionism, in an era where trade-union activity was low and most politically-active trade unionists were Liberals.
- Its starting impulse was from international questions - Ireland (Land League agitation), and Ottoman repression in the Balkans - and disappointment with the Liberals.
- Marx mistrusted Hyndman, and Engels disliked him. Hyndman ended by siding with Britain in World War One.
- However, Hyndman was militant against British imperialism in Ireland and India, and ran a group within which criticism was frequent and vocal.
- The SDF and its successors remained the major socialist educational force in Britain for decades, until its successor the British Socialist Party merged into the then-revolutionary Communist Party component in 1921.





SDF - BSP, 1881-1921

- 1899: TUC passes motion for independent labour political representation.
- 1900: SDF takes part in founding meeting of Labour Representation Committee. SDF disaffiliates in 1902 but SDF members continue active in local LRCs and in Labour conferences through Tus.
- 1911: SDF merges with a left-wing group from the ILP, and becomes British Socialist Party.
- 1914: BSP splits over attitudes to World War One; 1916: affiliates to Labour Party.
- 1921: BSP merges into Communist Party.

- Left: Democratic Federation membership card, designed by William Morris.
- 1881: Democratic Federation founded.
- 1883-4: Becomes Social Democratic Federation, launches *Justice*.
- 1887: SDF gains wide fame by organising big demonstrations of the unemployed.
- 1889: Will Thorne, SDF member, and Eleanor Marx, member of an SDF splinter, have leading role in gasworkers' dispute. Tom Mann and John Burns, recent ex-SDF, have leading roles in dock strike.
- 1892-3: SDF takes part in talks for socialist unity with other groups which never quite succeed.

“Making socialists”

- The SDF set its aim as what William Morris (a member 1883-5, and then a sympathetic collaborator in the mid-1890s, towards the end of his life) called "making socialists".
- Its routine: weekly meetings (initially Wednesday evenings), with lectures; occasional bigger public meetings; street meetings (usually Sunday mornings); and street sales of *Justice*.
- The SDF never quite worked out how to link this educational work with its members' day-to-day activity in the trade unions, but, starting from conditions of general hostility and indifference, it educated a whole generation of socialists.





The SDF and the Labour Party

- From early on the SDF ran candidates in elections - mostly local government, and initially mostly for school boards, but also parliamentary elections. They won seats in local government, but not until 1906 in Parliament.
- In 1906 SDF member Will Thorne was elected on a Labour ticket in West Ham South. Hyndman ran with the backing of the local Labour Representation Committee in Burnley, the SDF's stronghold outside London, and missed election only by a few hundred votes. But the SDF as such was not active in the Labour Party.

Picture: 29 Labour MPs were elected in 1906, and started to use the name "Labour Party"