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Much has been written about the degenerate conditions of London's East End during the latter half of the nineteenth-century. London's problem was that which faced any city in which industrialization outpaced the methodology and ideology of urban poor relief. The government's inability and reluctance to respond to the changing conditions caused by rapid industrialization rose from the complacency of a populace which believed that since the nation commanded the top rung of the world economic ladder, it would stay there regardless of the plight of its working class people. In addition, the populace still clung to the antiquated, medieval notion that the poor were poor because of something they themselves had done, not because of society.

However, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century the number of poor increased beyond the point at which society could attribute an individual's plight to himself. As the sentiment grew that society was at least partly to blame for the condition of many of the poor, so too did the ranks of those who wanted to create social welfare systems for the betterment of all. It was during the so called second industrial revolution that the greatest changes in London poor relief occurred

because the problem of the poor could no longer be ignored. If London and England were to remain successful in the world economy, then the economic conditions in England itself would have to improve. The years chosen as bookends for this paper serve to mark the period of the greatest changes in living conditions for the poor in England and more specifically in London. Eighteen- sixty-seven witnessed the passing of the Second Reform Bill which would initiate the oncoming change, whereas 1901 marked the birth of the Labor Party which would usher in a new era of urban poor reform.

To understand how the changes in urban poor relief came about during the second industrial revolution, it is necessary to review briefly the years prior to 1867, to see how events and ideologies during those years led to the Reform Bill of 1867 and subsequent reform measures. Prior to the start of the Industrial Revolution in 1780, English poor law dated to 1598. By this law, each parish in England assumed responsibility for the maintenance of its own poor either through poorhouses or a system of doles. This system was consistent with the ideology of the early modern times which divided the poor into two categories, the deserving and undeserving. The deserving poor usually consisted of the infirm and elderly who could not work. The undeserving poor were those who could work, but did not; hence they were poor because of their individual laziness not because of economic forces beyond their control.[1]

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[1]   For information on the poor of early modern Europe, consult: Robert Jütte, <u>Poverty and Deviance in Early Modern Europe</u> (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

This system worked well until the "demographic revolution" of the early industrial period when increased numbers of people migrated to the industrial cities in England, especially to London.[2] During this time the poor law system began to break down as more people moved to the cities. This was because parishes only had to help those poor who had been born within the parish boundaries. The problem of course was that the new workers who moved into the cities had no net to catch them if they found themselves unemployed because they no longer lived in their home parishes. While it was obvious that something had to be done with the rising numbers of the urban poor, middle-class notions were hard to change.

In 1776, Adam Smith published his *Wealth of Nations* which put forth the theory of the "division of labor."[3] This theory came during the early years of the Industrial Revolution when the numbers of the urban poor were growing and people were beginning to ask for change in the poor relief system. Smith believed that a laissez-faire economy would benefit all members of society, even the poor. The poor would, according to Smith, be able to maintain a minimum standard of life.[4] Political theorists and economists took this to heart believing that government intervention in poor relief was unnecessary with a free market economy. Smith's theory came at an inopportune time for the working, urban poor and weakened the already tenuous belief that the poor should be helped by the state. A further blow came two decades

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[2]   Gertrude Himmelfarb, The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 43.
[3]   Ibid. 44.
[4]   Ibid. 51-52.

later in 1798, when Thomas Malthus published his *Essay on Population* which would serve to "undermine whatever remained of the 'moral economy,'" namely the poor laws.[5] Thus it was that the growing sympathy and call for change in poor relief measures were nearly clipped in the bud during the early years of the industrial revolution.

It is ironic, however, that while Malthus' economics tore the old system of poor relief down, it simultaneously brought attention to the growing problem of the urban poor. It was in this climate that the Reform Act of 1832 was passed. The act was already outdated; many of "the abuses it was meant to correct having become less urgent by 1834."[6] Furthermore, it did little for the poor while strengthening the power of the middle class. However, while the act was "violated in practice" it nevertheless "exerted a powerful influence on the intellectual, moral, and social climate" during the following years.[7]

The next great influence on poor reform would be the ideology of socialism put forth by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. These men offered a theory that put power into the hands of the laborers (proletariat) who did all the work while getting none of the benefits due them for their work because of capitalist industrialists who sat back

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[5]   Himmelfarb, Idea of Poverty, 101
[6]   Ibid. 153.
[7]   Ibid. 153-154

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and reaped the benefits of their labor.[8] It would be this Marxist Theory that would influence the growing Socialist movement in England.

It was in this climate that a London journalist would do an in-depth study into the lives of the poor on the city's east side. During the 1850's and 1860's, Peter Mayhew would catalogue the lives of the East End London Poor and present to the nation a picture of the utmost depravity.[9] It would be all of these factors coming together that would slowly change the social perception of the poor. The changing perception would prompt the Reform Act of 1867 and subsequent laws, and lead to the formation of politically-conscious organizations like the socialist Fabians who would shape the future of poor relief in London.

By the 1860's, some people in government recognized the need for urban reform, yet little was attempted until 1866, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer, William E. Gladstone, spoke before the House of Commons in an attempt to push through a bill which would have extended the franchise to "seven pound borough householders and to lodgers whose annual rental amounted to £10."[10] In his speech Gladstone echoed the growing sentiment of those in government that "the influence of separate classes is too strong [in the government] and that the

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[8]   For a good overview of Marx's and Engels' thoughts, a good book to consult is The Marx-Engels Reader edited by Robert C. Tucker of Princeton University and printed by the W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. in 1972.

[9]   Mayhew's four volume series London Labour and the London Poor was first published in its entirety between 1861-1862 and has been reprinted several times. The printing used for this paper was the 1967 edition.

[10]   Jonathan F. Scott and Alexander Baltzly, ed., Readings in European History Since 1814 (New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1946), 173.

influence of the public interest...is too weak."[11] In this respect, an extension of the

franchise would increase the "representation of the working classes...who would

look not to the interests of classes, but to the public interest" and thus "array

more persons in support of the institutions of the country."[12] The bill was

defeated, but the next year the Reform Act of 1867 was passed which did greatly

enlarge the franchise and thus accomplish what Gladstone had fought for the

previous year.

This Reform Act seemingly turned Britain into a democracy overnight. Within

four years the English borough electorate increased from 500,000 to 1.25 million

persons thanks to the fact that the Act virtually established male household suffrage

on a one-year residency qualification.[13] The Reform Act of 1867 would mark the

"beginning of a process of reform" that would lead "to the incorporation of the

working classes into the political life of the nation."[14] As T. H. Green, an Oxford

don, remarked in that year: "The enfranchisement of the people is an end in

itself...without which there is no lasting social order or real morality."[15]

However, while Green spoke favorably for the lower classes, others were not so

enthused by the Reform Act . Queen Victoria was not. She was "exasperated" by

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[11]   W. E. Gladstone in House of Commons, April 27, 1866. In Jonathan F. Scott and Alexander Baltzly, ed., Readings in European History Since 1814 (New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1946), 173.
[12]   Ibid.
[13]   Jonathan Parry, The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 216.
[14]   Gertrude Himmelfarb, Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 70.
[15]   K. B. Smellie, "Victorian Democracy: Good Luck or Good Management," Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians: An Historic Revaluation of the Victorian Age (London: Sylvan Press, 1950), 292.

the actions of Gladstone and his Cabinet. She remarked that they had "'no respect for kings or princes or any of the landmarks of the constitution.'" Furthermore, she said that she would not be Queen of a "democratic monarchy."[16] Victoria was fearful of the new working class, poor electorate; why should they want an historically oppressive monarchy? Victoria, however, did not immediately have to worry about this new electorate who would not at first have a great impact on the political structure of the government. It would take time for the new electorate to impact the political life of Britain. The new electorate would be helped with the Reform Act of 1884, which gave one person in seven the right to vote, and as time progressed so too would the influence of the new electorate.[17]

At this point it is important to examine the condition of the new electorate that lived in London and how their plight was addressed in the coming years by new legislature and Victorian society. Immediately after the passage of the Reform Act of 1867, little changed for the poor of London. Many still lived in the same conditions as described by Mayhew a half decade before. On the streets one could still find the working poor who sold tid-bit items ranging from "flower girls" and "match girls" to "baked potato men" and "comb sellers."[18] In addition, the prostitutes, thieves, swindlers, and beggars still roamed if not lived on the streets.[19] Improvements, however, lay on the horizon.

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[16]   Ibid. 291.
[17]   Smellie, Victorian Democracy, 291.
[18]   For an in-depth description of these people and other London poor street sellers, consult volumes one and two of Mayhew's London Labour and the London Poor.

One of the first problems addressed was education. In his series Mayhew interviewed many of the poor and criminals of the streets of London. One of the characteristics that most of these people shared was their lack of education. Several of these persons emphasized that their lack of education was one of the factors contributing to their present, degredated condition.[20] Mayhew's account of the poor and their need for education seemed to come at the right time because in 1870, the second industrial revolution began. This second revolution saw the rise of Germany which became a major industrial competitor with Great Britain; one reason being Germany's emphasis on technical education and education in general. Both of these factors, Germany's rise and Mayhew's account of the poor, helped push Britain on a course toward education reform.

The first step was taken in 1870 with the passage of the Education Act of 1870. Under certain provisions of this act, school boards were given optional powers which empowered them to make school attendance compulsory through age ten. These optional powers were later made mandatory in general in 1880. Subsequent laws in 1893 and 1899 respectively raised the mandatory attendance age to eleven and twelve except in the case of children employed in agricultural work.[21] These reforms were a step in the right direction, but they

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[19] For a description of these "criminal" classes of people, consult volume four of Mayhew's London Labour and the London Poor.
[20] See the prostitute Ellen's story in volume four of Mayhew's series page 213 and the introduction to the thieves and swindlers section pages 273-276.
[21] F. M. L. Thompson, The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 135.

were modest at best.

They helped push middle class children into the classroom, but few poor children were helped by these bills. The problem was that in order to get an education in Britain at that time one had to pay tuition. The poor of course could not afford to send their children to school. There were some attempts to give poor children a free education through the issuance of tuition vouchers, but not only was this inefficient it was not very appealing to parents because it smacked of charity. To the Victorian working class poor, charity was a sign of weakness that should be avoided if possible.[22] A second problem was that children often worked to bring in extra income for the family. If the child was at school then that extra money did not find its way into the family coffers.[23] For these reasons truancy loomed as a large problem in London. In 1888 alone "3,000 summonses for non-attendance" were filed at the Thames Police Court.[24]

To stop this high incidence of non-attendance, truant officers were employed to bring the children to school. These officers, of course, ran into problems with parents who did not send their children to school because they could not afford to. Children usually did not play hooky on their own; "Victorian parental authority was such that if a child was told to go to school, it would go."[25] These

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[22] Thompson, Respectable Society, 135-136.
[23] James H. Treble, Urban Poverty in Britain, 1830-1914 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 68-69.
[24] W. J. Fishman, East End 1888: Life in a London Borough Among the Laboring Poor (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 125.
[25] Thompson, Respectable Society, 135-136.

poor parents were caught in a bind. Legally they were supposed to send their children to school and if they did not then they were hounded by the law. On the other hand, if they did send their children to school then they would lose a significant portion of their family income. They would loose both the children's' income and the cost of tuition. What were these families to do and what was a solution to this problem created when the government tried to help these poor people?

An answer came in 1888, when an East End woman named Annie Besant was elected to the London School Board as a representative of the Tower Hamlets.[26] Besant was able to recruit widespread support from such diverse groups as the Liberals, Radicals and the Socialist Central Democratic Committee. In her election address she put forth her proposal for education.[27] She said that there should be "free, secular, compulsory, technical education for...all classes alike...[to] break down class divisions and lay a basis for real equality."[28] These aims became the basis for future reforms throughout the nation; free education legislation would finally be passed in 1891. [29]

A second problem for the poor on the East End took the form of atrocious health conditions. To the middle class a healthy home was a "place of Peace, the

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[26] Annie Besant was the editor of a monthly magazine called *The Corner* which became a voice for the socialist Fabian Society in 1886. Besant also used the magazine as a vehicle to voice her opinions on education and the condition and help of the poor.

[27] Fishman, East End 1888, 290.

[28] Annie Besant in *Justice* 17 November 1888. Reprinted in part in Fishman, East End 1888, 291.

[29] Thompson, Respectable Society, 136.

shelter, not only from injury, but from all terror, doubt and division...," but the urban poor did not enjoy such an atmosphere of calm.[30] Thus many asked the question, how could these people expect to lift themselves out of poverty and crime if they did not have the dignity afforded by healthy standards of living?

There were two acts passed in 1875, which attempted to address this problem among the poor. One was the Public Health Act of 1875, and the other was the Artizans' and Labourers' Dwellings Improvement Act of 1875. Both of these acts attempted to clean up the dirty parts of London and other cities: the poor parts of towns.[31] The acts consolidated some provisions of laws passed in 1871 and 1872 and decentralized the health authority to promote local professionalism.[32] However, while these acts specifically attacked such things as open cesspools, narrow streets, overcrowding, and epidemic diseases, little seems to have been done on the local level to alleviate these problems.

Given that the two Acts passed in 1875, did very little to improve the living conditions of the poor in London, Parliament sent in a Royal Commission in 1884-1885, to examine the Housing of the Working Classes in London. Before Parliament, Lord Shaftesbury, Hugh Owen the Permanent Secretary to the Local Government Board (in London), and Miss Octavia Hill presented the findings of

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[30]   John Ruskin, Sesame and Lilies, 1864. In Asa Briggs, Victorian Things (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 213.
[31]   These Acts were respectively, Public General Statutes 38 & 39 Vict. c. 55, and Public General Statutes 38 & 39 Vict. c. 36. Partially reprinted in English Historical Documents (II) 1874-1914, edited by David C. Douglas in a series of eleven books of English Historical Documents edited by W. D. Handcock and published in New York by Oxford University Press, 1977. 613-616.
[32]   Perry, Rise and Fall, 238.

the inquiry. The reports were not inspiring.[33] Lord Shaftesbury observed: "The evil

of overcrowding has increased very much of late years...The population was

overcrowded before, but now they have become overcrowded to an extent which

I have never known."[34] Hugh Owen remarked: "The local authorities have not used

all the powers that are given to them by the Acts;...."[35] Miss Octavia Hill on new

housing in the East End: "Instead of building what the promoters who come from

comfortable homes think ought to be wanted, they should build what really is

wanted, and what is essential to health...."[36] Clearly the problem of overcrowding

was growing in the poorer parts of London. We can safely assume that as the

destitution of the East End grew, so to did crime. Furthermore, while there were

laws in place that could curb the declining living conditions in the East End, the

controlling powers were either unwilling to use their powers or they were using their

powers in an inappropriate way.

Still a third major problem facing those who lived in the East End was the

high incidence of crime. Few would deny that crime and poverty went hand and

hand, poverty often being the reason for crime. However, while it would make

more sense to help end poverty than to try to curtail crime through harsher

punishments, the latter proved more compelling.   Many were of the opinion that

"we are all to be made good by whipping; the nostrum of the nursery is to be applied

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[33]   *Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, 1884-5, Parliamentary Papers
1884-5, XXX, 24.* Reprinted in part in Douglas, English Historical Documents (II), 616-626.
[34]   Ibid. 617.
[35]   Ibid. 621.
[36]   *Royal Commission on Housing,* English Historical Documents (II). 622.

to adult humanity, and all crime will disappear as if by magic."[37] By this it was
meant that each crime should be punished to the logical extreme of the law.

Examples abound of the injustices of the law. One such example concerned
the case of a beggar and his son chronicled in the *East London Observer* on March
10, 1888:

> John Bailey, 45, and Alfred Bailey, 5, were charged with begging.
> Mr. Saunders sentenced John Bailey to seven days; imprisonment,
> and ordered the child to be sent to the workhouse.[38]

There were numerous cases similar to this where "over-justice" was handed
out. One case involved a middle aged woman who was arrested for fortune
telling and sentenced to one month in jail with hard labor.[39] Of course the list
goes on and on, but now it is important to look at the places where these minor
criminals were sent: the prisons and the workhouses.

Amazingly, some of the best information on the conditions of the prisons in
London can be gleaned from an interesting little book originally meant to serve as
a guide to the seedier and spookier parts of London.[40] Two of the more infamous
prisons were Coldbath Fields and Newgate. Coleridge wrote about Coldbath:

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[37]   *East London Advertiser* 20 October 1888, "The New Birch Rod Remedy" in Fishman, East End
1888, 178.
[38]   Fishman, East End 1888, 181.
[39]   Fishman, East End 1888, 181-182.
[40]   Steve Jones, London...The Sinister Side (London: J. W. Brown Limited, 1986). While this
book would not be considered scholarly, it does a much better job than any scholarly publication I
reviewed in describing the prison life in London's jails. Perhaps it is due to the emotional affect on
the reader that the book makes by describing the most horrendous and depraving conditions that
could possibly be found in a government sanctioned institution.

> "As he went through Cold Bath Fields he saw
> A solitary cell;
> And the devil was pleased, for it gave him a hint
> For improving his prisons in Hell."[41]

It was an apt description. Silence was the rule at both prisons. Most prisoners had planks for beds in dirty cells. Their food consisted of bread, gruel, potatoes, meat, soup and cocoa. The bread was stale, the potatoes often had black disease and the meat was often so rancid that it crawled with black beetles; but the prisoners ate the food anyway. Many were known to supplement their diet with weeds found in the yard and with candle wax. What made matters worse was the work that the prisoners engaged in behind bars.[42]

One of the most common jobs given to prisoners was the picking of oakum which consisted of unraveling old, tarred, ships' ropes over one inch thick, in order to re-spin the strands into new rope for reuse. Another form of work consisted walking uphill on a treadmill to raise water for the prison, although often prisoners were made to climb the treadmill for no particular reason except to be cruel. Still another kind of labor consisted of moving 24 lb. cannon balls from one side of a room to another and back again for upwards of seventy-five minutes.[43]

Still, this was not necessarily the worst part of prison life. In Newgate, for example, how one was treated depended entirely on how much money one had.

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[41] Ibid. 17.
[42] Steve Jones, London...The Sinister Side, 17.
[43] Ibid.

If one were a wealthy inmate like Lord Byron he could afford to live fairly comfortably. However, if one were a poor bloke from the East End he could rest assured that whatever he did have would immediately be stolen and he would be left to fend for himself, probably without even a bed to lie on. Beds, like all necessities had to be paid for at Newgate.[44]

Another extreme in executing justice and putting the fear of punishment into the populace in London was the use of public executions. Public executions for various things like murder and rape, were meant to deter crime. However, usually such spectacles were a hotbed for other forms of criminal activity such as pick-pocketing. In the end neither the atrocious conditions of the prisons nor the public executions helped to deter criminal activity.[45] Actually, it often made those who went to prison better and more ruthless criminals. The government powers did not understand that people who have nothing to lose will willingly take from others in order to have something whether that be a piece of bread or someone's life.

Another so called deterrent to crime and poverty was the workhouse, kindly referred to as the 'Bastille' after the horrendous Paris prison torn down by the revolutionaries in 1789. In these workhouses inmates would either pick oakum or crush flint. In exchange for this monotonous and backbreaking work the inmate would receive meals consisting of 8 oz. of bread and either ⌂ lb. of gruel or ⌂ oz of

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[44] Ibid. 19.
[45] Steve Jones, London...The Sinister Side, 74-84.

cheese. The inmate was given a quota to fill and if this was not done then he/she remained the next day and along with the old quota was given a new one to complete. Another problem with the workhouses was that parents could, in effect, sell their children into its care. This is not to say that the workhouses did not help some people stay alive a little longer, but for the most part workhouses were looked down upon even by those they were supposed to help. Furthermore, there is some evidence that suggests those who were sentenced to the workhouses, much like those in prison, learned to be better criminals. In the end the workhouses did little to help the poor.[46]

The governing body eventually realized the problems inherent in the criminal justice system. In order, to combat overcrowding in the prisons and workhouses the Debtors' Act was passed in 1869. This act was very beneficial for the lower classes who were often imprisoned because of default of payment.[47] In 1877, a Prison Act was passed which provided maintenance for the prisons to be taken from money provided by Parliament. This included beds for all prisoners and better food. Furthermore, it provided for empowered committees that could at any time investigate atrocities in the prisons.[48] By 1895, Gladstone could report:

> If the conditions and treatment of prisoners at the present
> time are compared with what they were sixty, forty, or
> even twenty years ago, the responsible authorities could

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[46]   Fishman, East End 1888, 82-114.
[47]   Douglas, English Historical Documents (I), 536-537
[48]   Prison Act 1877, Douglas, English Historical Documents (II), 433-435.

justly claim credit for great and progressive improvement.
The bad prisons have disappeared.[49]

It was in light of these conditions that the events of 1886 took place. Two things would happen in this year that would have a profound impact on the urban poor reform movement; both would occur in September in London. The first important event was Charles Booth's decision to begin investigating the lives of the East London poor. Booth took it upon himself to try to find out what made East London so wretched and what could be done to alleviate the problem, little having changed since the Health Acts of 1875 or been done since the Royal Commission investigation of the previous year. Booth himself in describing one of the East End streets (Ginger Street) would remark that it was "very rough and untidy...reeking of fish. Fishes' heads, and...entrails [were in] the gutters. The houses were ill-cared for and shabby [with] broken windows."[50] As Booth recognized, such horrible living conditions were one of the factors contributing to the wretched living of the urban poor.

The second important event would be the split in England's socialist movement. In September there occurred a two-day socialist debate in Fleet Street, London. It was at this event that the Fabian Society broke away from the Anarchists. They realized that the events of Bloody Sunday[51] a year before "had

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[49] Gladstone Report on Prisons, *Parliamentary Papers 1895, LVI, col. 7702,* Douglas, English Historical Documents (II), 436.
[50] Charles Booth, On the City: Physical Pattern and Social Structure (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 207.

destroyed 'the illusion that revolution was just around the corner, and the futility of playing at revolution [was] accepted.'[52] The Fabians recognized the futility of trying to tear down the system. Instead they attempted to enact changes through the system and in the process became one of the most vocal political organizations advocating improvements for the working classes and the urban poor.

It is important now to jump ahead two years to 1888. In this year William Booth founded the Salvation Army. Starting small in London, it opened its first hostel on 18 February in a former warehouse at 21 West India Dock Road. At first many of the local renters and sellers of lodging and food were very upset with Booth who offered both for nominal rates thus under-cutting their profits. Religious men criticized him for not preaching the Gospel to those who entered the door. Still others looked to Booth's helpers, often young women who seemingly sacrificed their lives for the cause of the Salvation Army, and criticized them for wasting their time and endangering their health by working at the hostel. The newspapers, at least those with some socialist leanings, proclaimed Booth's enterprise as a worthy cause and praised him for his endeavors. Booth's organization, however, outlasted its critics.[53]

In his attempts to help the poor, Booth supplied ammunition to the Fabians in

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[51] "Bloody Sunday, 13 November 1887. A planned series of demonstrations and marches organized by the Metropolitan Federation of Radical Clubs to protest against coercion in Ireland, were broken up with much violence by the police before reaching Trafalgar Square (banned for public meetings by Police Commissioner on 8 November)." Fishman, East End 1888, 3.

[52] Fishman, East End 1888, 266-267.

[53] Fishman, East End, 255-263.

their attempt to change the government's role in poor relief, Booth himself being a socialist sympathizer.[54]   The Fabians' goal was "to help forward the reconstruction of the social system in accordance with the highest moral possibilities."[55] They professed that each person should provide for themselves by their own labor. The State should provide a liberal education for all. Men and women should be considered equal in the political arena.[56] These and other radical, yet noble ideals formed the basis for the Fabian Society.

The Fabian Society in London was a small organization. In 1886 there were only 88 members which rose to 350 in 1891 and 800 in 1900.[57] Small numbers in membership, however, can be misleading as to the impact that the Fabian Society would have on the social consciousness of London and the nation. Some of its more well known members included George Bernard Shaw, Annie Besant, and Sidney and Beatrice Webb who would write prolificaly about the poor in London and England in several books published at the turn of the century.[58]

This organization believed in gradualism and evolution. They believed that society would change over time and not quickly in some violent thrust of government upheaval. To promote their ends they tried to work within the system

54   Ibid.
55   "The Fabian Society and Socialist Notes" , Our Corner, Annie Besant ed. any issue 1886-
56   Fabian Tract No. 2. A Manifesto (by G. B. Shaw). London, 1884. Reprinted in Scott and Baltzly, Readings Since 1814, 191-192.
57   Himmelfarb, Poverty and Compassion, 353.
58   For a good history of the poor laws in Britain down through the 1920's consult: Sidney and Beatrice Webb, English Poor Law History, 2 vols. (Printed by the authors, 1929).

to enact change. They became so influential that in 1886, Sidney Webb, referring to the Society, remarked: "'Nothing is done in England without the consent of a small intellectual yet political class in London, not 2,000 in number.'"[59]

As already mentioned, Annie Besant tackled education and edited a magazine to educate people in the ways of social reform. George Bernard Shaw, always a vocal person, promoted through his literary work the Fabian message of gradualism over the radical socialists message of revolution. The Webbs, for their part, attempted to educate by doing in-depth studies into the lives of the East End poor much as Mayhew and Booth had done in previous decades.

Another tool employed by the Fabians was to sponsor lectures around London and Britain in order to inculcate socialist feelings into the listeners. In 1888-89, 700 such lectures were given in London while two years later the number rose to 3,000 for London and the provincial societies together. What the Fabians preached was a society of equals brought about gradually through education and permeation of their ideals, not by social revolution and struggle between the classes.[60] They sought the "National Minimum" which was "standards for wages, health, education, employment, and leisure."[61] It would be these ideas that the government would adopt as they attempted to improve the conditions of the poor in London. The only alternative was to face a revolution.

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[59] Stefan Collini, <u>Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930</u> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 50.
[60] Himmelfarb, <u>Poverty and Compassion</u>, 350-380.
[61] Ibid. 374.

The 1880's saw an increase in the amount of concern given to the urban poor and it perhaps reached its peak in the decade, but improvements were continued by the government on into the 1890's. In 1891, the Factories Act was passed which established fines for employers who forced workers to operate dangerous machinery or who provided an insufficiently healthy working environment for the employees.[62] In that same year a "Fair Wages" Resolution also passed which made "provision(s) against the evils recently disclosed before the Sweating Commission" in the case of government contracts. Such evils included the practice of sub-letting and the payment of below fair wages to "competent workmen."[63]

Ultimately the Independent Labour Party (ILP) would be founded in 1896, as a direct descendent of the Marxist Social Democratic Federation (SDF). The Independent Labour Party was formed in order to give a political voice to the common worker. Being the offspring of a fairly radical group, the ILP would at first be fairly radical itself as a representative of the ever expanding trade union movement. Ironically the ILP would, in 1901, spawn the Labour Party (still active today) which would be largely influenced by the ideas of the gradualist Fabians and their contemporaries like William Booth.[64]

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[62] *Public General Statutes*, 54 & 55 Vict. c. 75 (Factory and Workshop). Reprinted in part in Douglas, English Historical Documents, 632-633.
[63] *Hansard*, 3rd series, CCCL, col. 647. Reprinted in Douglas, English Historical Documents, 662.
[64] Himmelfarb, Poverty and Compasion, 328, 333.

Now that the common man had a true voice in the political arena, changes would come faster; although this did not exclude the need for private reform organizations like the Salvation Army. With the help of reform minded individuals the conceptions of the poor and how they could be helped had changed. This change in ideology thrust Britain on its way to becoming a welfare state. London would be greatly affected by this change and though poverty remained a problem, the conditions in the East End improved.

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