The Real Social Democratic Federation

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The Real Social Democratic Federation:

Rank and File Branch Activities and Responses in Mill Town Lancashire 1884-1918

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Abstract Summary of Thesis

The historiography of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) is one which is stereotyped and based primarily on general and national accounts of the party. The caricature is one of a party led by H. M. Hyndman, wherein Marxist ideology dominates and the development of the party is characterised by a disregard of women issues, a refusal to cooperate with trade unions and a tirade of internal in-fightings which led to dismal defeat, little contribution to the labour movement and a final transformation into the British Socialist Party.

This, the first local study of the SDF, investigates four local SDF branches in Lancashire. The cultural and historical tradition of the county provides a unique picture of the early twentieth century labour movement and provides a more detailed and complex picture of what local politics was vis a vis national developments. A distinct Lancashire workers' culture and extensive social and commercial changes impacting lifestyles offer novel influential structures and arguments that affected the progress of a political party.

The findings in this study have uncovered evidence and events which provide a more nuanced interpretation of the infamous 'stage army'. Key aspects, previously overlooked, are that the party was not one homogenous entity but more a collection of semi-autonomous 'islands' led by forceful individuals who often acted independently. In addition, the party implemented a strategy of 'fighting the good fight' and placed an emphasis on utilising education to convert weavers. The former proved most ineffective, more so in national than local elections, and the latter fell foul of a weavers' culture that did not value learning and focused more on immediate

day-to day concerns and pleasure. Finally and unwittingly, perseverance and over thirty years of propaganda would aid the next party of the Left, the Labour Party.

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List of Abbreviations.

ASS Adult Suffrage Society

AWA Amalgamated Weavers association

BSP British Socialist Party

BTLC Burnley Trades and Labour Council

BWA Burnley Weavers Association

CHA Christian Holiday Association

CLC Council of Labour Colleges

CLP Conservative Labour Party

CIU Club and Institute Union

ILP Independent Labour Party

LCMF Lancashire and Cheshire Miners Federation

LEA Labour Electoral Association

LRC Labour Representation Committee

MDSRC Manchester District Socialist Representation Committee

NAGL National Anti-Gambling League

NASL National Anti-Suffrage League

NHRU National Home Language Union

NLOWS National League for Opposing Women's Suffrage

NUWSS National Union of Women's Suffrage Society

SDF Social Democratic Federation

SPGB Socialist Party of Great Britain

TOA Textile Operatives Association

WEA Workers' Education Association

WEC Women's Education Committee (SDF)

WCG Women's Cooperative Guild

WLL Women's Labour League

WSPU Women's Social and Political Union

WWBA Warpers Winders and Beamers Association

Chapter 1

Introduction

The history of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), up until now, has been one based primarily on national and general interpretations. These histories have often based their understandings on the hypothesis that political parties are homogenous political groupings, one of many past assertions that this thesis will challenge. The historiography of the SDF has primarily focused on the failure of the party and the events and actions of executive personalities. Seen often as an irrelevance, or a minor actor within the story of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century labour history, the story of the SDF is all too dismissive, often one-dimensional and overtly simple. This local Lancastrian study, the first of its kind within the SDF register, will provide a much more nuanced and refined explanation as to what the SDF was and how it performed its functions and actions in the red rose county at the turn of the last century. The central focus of this investigation is the SDF but the study goes further by exploring how political activists and movements implemented their beliefs. It notes how an understanding of political party needs to be added to socio-economic and structural interpretations of radicalism and also realises 'how the culture of radicalism was far richer and more varied than an exclusive focus on class would suggest'.[1] This study will challenge previous historiographical approaches and show that to understand labour history and political parties' actions better, historians must be aware of the interconnectedness between organisations and environments and between individual actions and particular local circumstances.

[1] Matthew Roberts, *Political Movements in Urban England 1832-1914* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2009), p. 49

This introduction will engage in a discussion of some of the main features of the thesis: the political background prior to the arrival of the SDF, the mill town environments, leisure, the growing importance of localism in historical research, SDF branches and methodology. The literature of the SDF and more broadly speaking the historiography of issues like leisure are reviewed throughout the introduction instead of utilising one particular section, thereby incorporating the many diverse aspects of previous argument and opinion across the outline. This places the study within the wider literature to show where it fits within and how it relates to that literature.

To understand the SDF better I have investigated a cross-section of Lancashire mill towns. The predominant existence of the cotton industry in Lancashire, 1891 – 1921, led to an investigation across several locations with four towns in particular providing the majority of the evidence in this study; Burnley, Nelson, Bolton and Rochdale. These towns provide the study with a very specific industrial and cultural environment, which encompasses both complexity and insight by investigating the role socialist activists played as significant predecessors to the Labour Party. The mill towns reveal a particular environment that is nuanced, layered and contained particular Lancastrian social features. A Lancashire Liberalism existed which challenged aggressively for the support of workers. A moral code of respectability was predominant that abhorred radicalism and celebrated hard work and a religious structure pervaded the communities that though conservative and orthodox was also Nonconformist and provided pathways for alternative thinking. Each of these inducements would influence the SDF branches and mill town workers in general and specific ways. Liberalism, essentially a laissez-faire political philosophy, was always full of internal tensions and differing interpretations. From the Todmordern manufacturer and MP for Oldham (1832-47), John Fielden, to the atheist Charles Bradlaugh (1833-1891), Liberalism would be an early conduit for radicalism. Its main significance for the SDF being its long historical association with ‘progressive’ politics that would challenge the SDF at the election polls. Respectability, though a difficult part of workers’ culture to define, ‘was usually judged by the neighbours, and the criteria were multiple, complex,

and varied'.[2] It was a key feature of workers' lifestyles and this investigation will show that mill town propriety and decorum undoubtedly influenced political behaviour and support.

Religion too was a part of the interconnectedness of political inspiration and one of the towns in this study (Nelson) reflects well the long-held belief that Methodism affected local politics by creating a socialism that sought its worth in hard work and temperance and not in the SDF who were perceived all too often as not respectable and too radical. Furthermore, workers were not necessarily class-conscious and different wage economies existed that meant that many mill towns could possess both a 'rough' and poor stratum of workers and a 'respectable' and more affluent grouping. The mill towns, therefore, were not singular entities to be interpreted as one deterministic whole but an entire swathe of differing facets of social interaction. The towns possessed a general culture, which was tied to notions of respectability and immediacy, but each town possessed its own particular and unique aberrations or events, within that general culture, that were specific and would impact on political development. Therefore from the outset, it is important to acknowledge that though a general mill town culture can be perceived that influenced weavers and activists alike, differences of behaviour and approaches to life did exist. Nelson was influenced by a very strong Methodist movement whereas Burnley less so. Weavers' earnings were not uniform and different levels of spending and status existed within the workers' communities. A large set of general mores and traditions of behaviour existed but caveats and paradoxes were not uncommon wherein poverty would run parallel to a certain level of affluence.

A significant part of this thesis is dedicated to an assessment and investigation of the effects of socialisation and leisure on the SDF in Lancashire. Originally seen as inconsequential, leisure has been acknowledged to have had a distinct effect on culture and politics. As Susie Steinbach noted in her investigation of the Victorians,

[2] Susie Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians* (London: Routledge Press, 2012), p. 131

'historians no longer see the history of leisure as a history of discontinuities and attacks on working-class culture. Instead, they see a complex story characterised by gradual changes'.[3] In addition, a boom in leisure activities in Lancashire attached to sport and self-fulfilment necessitated a process of socialisation that all too often the SDF activists were alienated from, sometimes because of a condescending reluctance to participate in mass sport and drink and sometimes by their own immature political strategies which misunderstood the mill town culture. As the leader of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Harry Pollitt, had presciently noted by 1920, workers 'cared only for beer, tobacco and horse-racing'.[4] By assessing socialisation and leisure, one receives a more refined interpretation of the environment of the local activists and the changing world at large. Greater disposable incomes and extensive social distractions would influence workers and individual SDF activists were often absent from these social arenas or ineffective. Ultimately, this leads to conclusions as to how and in what way national and local politics were interrelated and why SDF politics struggled to influence workers on the streets of Lancashire.

Alan Kidd's interpretation of the SDF as 'contrary to the prevalent stereotype, a decentralized organisation with significant branch autonomy' is a central tenet in understanding both SDF success and failure, and one certainly reflected in this study.[5] This Lancastrian revision will show that the SDF branches in Lancashire were small, well-organized branches of socialism often engaged in street politics whose interpretations of socialism were very different to that outlined in the extant historiography. This pattern is so pronounced that I have termed the branches 'SDF islands'. Contrary to 'broad-stroke' general histories, the mill towns reveal that SDF branches had a unique and often independent nature.[6] Branches were often led by one or two prominent individuals in each town, they received little central direction

[3] Ibid., p. 147
[4] Piers Brandon, *The Dark Valley. A Panorama of the 1930s* (London: Pimlico Press, 2001), p. 44
[5] Alan J. Kidd, 'The SDF and Popular Agitation Amongst the Unemployed in Edwardian Manchester', *International Review of Social History*, 29:3, 1984, p.337
[6] Walter Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-21* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969). Martin Crick, *The History of the Social Democratic Federation* (Keele: Ryburn Publishing, 1994). Mark Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism* (Oxford: Princeton Press, 2010).

and often worked with provincial issues pertinent to each separate branch. Mill town branches also reveal that from the very beginning the party applied an election strategy that was flawed. I have termed this approach 'fight the good fight'. Activists implemented a strategy wherein, at any and every opportunity, members would exert all their energies in competing in as many election campaigns as was possible. This strategy deserves further attention because it exposes much about the federal and random nature of the party in which local activists often directed the party haphazardly beyond executive control. In addition, two other political directions of the party provide more evidence of strategical failure. The party's local activities in free speech fights and an extensive engagement in unemployment demonstrations tell how activists often misunderstood workers and how confrontational actions alienated the party from further mainstream support.

Importantly, this thesis reveals that a great deal of politics was interconnected, sometimes dependent upon chance, often dependent upon the strength of individual personalities and mainly dependent upon the practical local political issue at hand. Eventually, the development of the Labour Party led to a filtering of SDF members into that very same party as it developed into the main representative of 'Left' politics in the England before 1914. Finally, this thesis provides evidence of the importance of local history in understanding national history, the pivotal role played by influential individuals and that ultimately, neither the SDF, nor the suffragette movement, nor the trade councils, nor the weavers unions, were ever single entities acting alone. All would be most dependent upon local events and local individuals in making their histories.

Background

The Lancashire towns of this study were readily acknowledged at the end of the last century as cotton towns due to the large number of workers engaged in the weaving

industry. The population and occupation chart, table X, highlights the dominance of the cotton industry. The figures are compelling. From Nelson and Burnley in the north east corner of Lancashire, to Bolton and Rochdale on the northern side of Manchester, industry was dominated by the labours of the cotton industry and a significant proportion of workers in these towns would be affected and dependent upon the mills and their surrounding industries. The 1911 Census noting that in Rochdale, 'cotton is the predominant feature in the town, as it is in the whole cordon of busy towns which surround Manchester'. Of Blackburn, the report noted 'that indeed Blackburn is the most important weaving centre in Lancashire'. Of Burnley, one reads 'one of the group of Lancashire towns which owe their importance to the cotton trade'.[7] A close look at one ward in Nelson reinforces this fact. Of 461 persons living in Netherfield ward in 1891, 255 are employed. Of these, 131 persons over the age of fourteen are employed in the cotton mills.[8] One can readily perceive that the Lancashire towns of this study at the turn of the last century were places where 'cotton was king'.

[7] Census of England and Wales 1911, preliminary report, April 3rd, p.391, 92, 120

[8] Census of England and Wales, 1891, Population Figures For The Pendle District (West), Nelson Library, Ref, O8F

Populations and Occupations in Mill towns 1891 – 1911

Table X. Census Reports of England and Wales 1891, 1901 and 1911.

	Bolton		Burnley		Rochdale		Blackburn	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1891								
Total population	146,487		87,016		76,176		120,064	
Textiles	9,386	13,968	-	-	-	-	-	-
Domestic	-	2,324	-	-	-	-	-	-
1901								
Total population	168,215		97,043		83,114		127,626	
Percentage of working women in textiles.	-	15,1%	-	33,8%	-	23%	-	37,9%
Textiles	11,625	15,687	-	-	-	-	-	-
Domestic	-	2,598	-	-	-	-	-	-
1911								
Total population	180,851		106,765		-		133,052	
Textiles	15,076	21,008	14,778	20,195	5,510	12,318	13,971	23,960
Engineering	5,612	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mines	-	-	3,603	-	-	-	-	-
Domestic	-	-	-	1,788	-	-	-	-
Percentage of children age 10-14 employed in mills. [9]	-	-	-	-	-	-	29.3	29.4

A radical inheritance prior to the SDF provides a background as to how and why workers' groupings came into existence and how 'radicalism' was beset with a myriad of interpretations. Forms of workers' protest were extant in Lancashire in the mid-nineteenth century. Large moorland gatherings and meetings characterised unrest. From Blackstone Edge just outside Rochdale, to the Basin Stone on Walsden Moor overlooking Todmordern, protesters would gather in large numbers. Chartist leader Bronte O'Brien urged workers to walk out and gather in large numbers: 'Let the cry be to the Moor! To the Moor!!'[10] As Katrina Navickas has noted, these gathering sites and the men who spoke at them became what sociologists term synecdoches, shorthand

[10] *Northern Star*, 13 Oct 1838.

epithets concentrating a range of associations or narratives, simplified enough to be interpreted onward through narrative and memory and to represent heroic revolt. A cautionary note to the nature of these early labour gatherings needs to be added though. After a Chartist meeting at Blackstone Edge in June 1848, the *Northern Star* noted that the gathering was 'a huge picnic party rather than of a meeting having a political object'[11]. Indeed, the possibility of actually being able to hear any outdoor address in such large gatherings was small and speeches were often made for and aimed at newspaper reporters. This suggests that protest meetings were as much social as political and a much smaller amount of political engagement than initially assumed was conducted by both organizers and listeners. As such, 'mass' political gatherings of this era incorporated a lot less active engagement than initially believed. The huge Chartist rally at Kersal Moor on 24 September 1838, said to have attracted a huge crowd of 300,000 people, coincided with the annual Manchester horse races held in the same place later that afternoon.[12] Often, then, political meetings and workers' gatherings were what Foucault termed 'heterotopias', 'ephemeral spaces that are carnivalesque….obeying their own rules´.[13] The experience and the environment being 'more likely vehicles for a more diffuse or less formulated political expression of the ordinary attenders, in contrast to the radical leaders'.[14] This non-political characteristic, or partial political engagement, can be applied to labour gatherings at the turn of the twentieth century. It is of particular significance as it challenges the extent of political involvement of ordinary men and women and from the beginning raises questions and doubts about how much support political parties, including the SDF, actually had. Therefore, though radicalism had a fertile ground for development in industrial Lancashire, the content of support for political parties is much more complicated than a surface glance might suggest. This is an early indication that how acts and political events were portrayed, might have been more important than reality.

[11] *Northern Star,* 17 June 1848.
[12] Katrina Navickas, 'Moors, Fields and Popular Protest in South Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire 1800-1848', *Northern History*, 46:1, 2009, p.109.
[13] Ibid., p.110.
[14] Ibid., p.108.

In addition, and most importantly, trade union development had also taken hold in Lancashire in the late nineteenth century. The Amalgamated Weavers Association (AWA), the largest weavers' union in the county, had established branches in 29 Lancastrian towns by 1884.[15] This was significant for the local SDF branches for three reasons. First, because this union organisation already existed before the SDF and therefore unions were *a priori* representative of workers. Second, because union leaders were conservative in outlook, sometimes Liberal in politics, and often believed that politics ought to be kept out of trade union business. Third, because much of radical English political philosophy at the end of the nineteenth century was already built on a tradition of parliamentary reform that had been successfully sated with parliamentary reforms in 1832, 1867 and 1884. The paradox was that Marxist socialism, purported to be the philosophy of the SDF, was considered by many workers' leaders to be unnecessary and existing workers' organisations were already far removed from the politics of socialism.[16] The Lancashire political environment already had entrenched workers' organisations and as Peter Clarke outlined, a traditional political ideology of progressivism present in the Liberal Party. As Clarke would conclude, the two major changes in early twentieth-century British politics was the emergence of class politics in a stable form and the replacement of the Liberal Party by the Labour Party. Importantly for the SDF, it was an electoral shift to the Left with little ideological mettle 'to prevent the movement from drifting into mere reformism'.[17] While synecdoches provided dissatisfaction to utilise, the main workers' representatives railed against socialism and radical politics. Chartist radicalism had existed but 'now the red rose county possessed a cotton industry prone to slumps and booms, its trade union leaders strongly amassed against socialist initiatives'.[18] These factors placed Lancastrian SDF members in a unique and challenging environment.

[15] Edwin Hopwwod*, A History of the Lancashire Cotton Industry and the Amalgamated Weavers Association* (Manchester: Cooperative Press, 1969), p. 53
[16] Roberts, *Political Movements*, p. 34
[17] Peter Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 405
[18] Malcom Chase. *Chartism. A New History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p.63.

Exploring SDF branch development in the mill towns will highlight the inadequacies of national and general histories, which overlook the diverse nature of the party's beginnings. Local history tells that SDF branches grew because of industrial strife and were very reliant upon one or two persistent activists in each town. Strike actions were the direct reasons for branch formation in Blackburn and Bolton and would later prove a major catalyst in Burnley. The standard national picture presented of an anti-union stance from the SDF was not evident in Lancashire. Several Lancastrian SDF activists were members of miners and weavers' trade unions. Though these unions were often Liberal orientated, cumbersome and conservative, SDF activists did not shun them as political conduits. Eventually, the SDF campaigners, often unwittingly, stumbled forward and made pathways for the coming socialist party of the future, the Labour Party. The SDF activists' unique local reasons and circumstances would be something very different from that of any national executive in London.

Historiographical Beginnings

The last significant academic study of the SDF was concluded by Martin Crick almost thirty years ago in 1994. In his comprehensive monograph, *The Social Democratic Federation*, Crick appeared to catalogue and outline the many broad sweeping currents and turns of the party and improved our understanding of what Henry Pelling once noted as the 'stage army' of socialism.[19] Crick's overview of the party is a fine example of the dominant methodology to date and much can be taken from it. In particular, Crick demonstrated that the SDF should be viewed as pioneers rather than advocates of an alien creed. He also argued against Tsuzuki's endurable over-simplistic assertion that the Lancashire SDF was right wing.[20] Nevertheless, the historiography of the SDF to date has been one constructed from a national perspective encompassing many generalisations, colourful executive characters and unsuccessful events. Walter Kendall listed the general deficiencies of the party one after the other:

[19] Crick, *The History of the Social Democratic Federation,* p.35.
[20] Ibid., p. 118

> Yet if the SDF's sectarianism, its hostility to strikes, its half-hearted attitude to reform, its isolationist attitude towards the Labour Party, its failure to endorse the suffrage agitation, and the anti-Jewish prejudice of some of its leaders, were important factors in preventing the party's growth, there was one other characteristic which may well have outweighed all these in its effects on the party's fortunes. The SDF leadership consistently viewed the Conservatives as a lesser enemy than the Liberals, an attitude which was in flat opposition to the whole trend of thought in the British Labour Movement.[21]

Though initially appealing and seemingly concluded, the current interpretation is essentially misleading and at best only partially correct. The present orthodoxy has centred on national individual leaders and general traits that are seen to have permeated the SDF entirely. Some reassessment has been forthcoming, especially in the field of leisure. Jeffrey Hill suggested that the ideological effect of leisure had been overlooked and Matthew Hinton gave examples of SDF engagement in the development of consumer politics.[22] Marcus Morris has also added to this reconsideration by raising the issue of sartorial presentations and personalities noting that both Hyndman and Keir Hardie 'were both actors playing a part for dramatic and political effect'.[23] Nevertheless, SDF party failure has been often attributed to the SDF leader H.M. Hyndman's authoritarian style, 'Hyndman's determination to remain undisputed leader of the party had its roots in his openly expressed contempt for uneducated and undisciplined democracy'.[24] This interpretation is given further credence when one reviews Hyndman's own personal recollections. Taking into account that the Edwardian era no doubt created a certain type of top-hatted gentleman, as Hyndman liked to often politically portray himself, it is difficult not to interpret many of his utterances as snobbish and alienating from the mills of Lancashire. Hyndman described Michael Davitt's help at the 1906 general election in dismissive style noting Davitt had 'failed to secure me the Irish vote at Burnley was

[21] Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain*, p. 32
[22] Jeffrey Hill, 'Requiem for a Party', *Labour History Review*, 61:1, Sept 1996, p. 108. Matthew Hilton, *Consumerism in 20th Century Britain*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 45
[23] Marcus Morris, 'The Most Respectable Looking of Revolutionaries', *Cultural and Social History*, 12:3, Dec 2015, p. 326
[24] Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain*, p. 10

only to be expected'. Hyndman relates the subsequent defeat in yet more pompous terminology 'the people were not educated enough to understand the crucial importance of socialism to themselves and their children'.[25] Furthermore, leading SDF theorist Ernest Belfort Bax's misogynist outpourings and SDF news editor Harry Quelch's obstinate political positioning were seen as other major stumbling blocks.[26] The party has also been criticised for a strict adherence to Marxist ideology and a reluctance to cooperate with other socialist groupings. James Hinton labelled Hyndman's approach 'doctrinaire and deterministic' and cited the failure of the British Socialist Party (BSP) as a consequence of Hyndman's influence, 'a prime example of the triumph of dogma over realism in socialist politics'.[27] Contemporary protagonists were subjective detractors and often vilified Hyndman. Bruce Glasier attacked the SDF leader for 'his dry presentation', which made socialism appear unappealing. Tom Mann attacked the SDF 'for not appreciating the trade union movement'.[28] Even some members of the SDF themselves held similar opinions. Frank Tanner described Hyndman as 'arrogant, autocratic and unscrupulous' and Bax as possessing a female antagonism that 'amounted to an obsession'.[29] Importantly, contemporary opponents and characters may well have had something to gain by presenting the SDF leadership in a particular negative light and therefore one ought to address this critique with guarded doubt.

The popular belief is that the leadership was politically inept and its careless utterances alienated the SDF. The party is seen to have made fundamental strategical errors and in conjunction with internal disagreements and in-fights the party failed. An article on the various rupture's within the SDF in the mid twentieth century written by Chushichi Tsuzuki argued that Hyndman's disparagement of Marx and Engels

[25] H.M. Hyndman, *Further Reminiscences* (London: MacMillan and Co, 1912), pp. 51 and 73
[26] E. J. Hobsbawm, 'Hyndman and the SDF' *New Left Review,* 1:10, July/Aug 1961, pp. 69-72;
K. Laybourn, 'The Failure of Socialist Unity in Britain, 1893,1914', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* Vol. 4, 1994, pp. 153-175
[27] James Hinton, *Labour and Socialism. A History of the British Labour Movement 1867-1974* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1983), p. 94
[28] Mark Bevir, 'HM Hyndman: A Rereading and a Reassessment', *History of Political Thought*, 12:1, 1991. p. 125
[29] Frank Tanner, *British Socialism in the early 1900's* (London: Socialist History Society, 2014), pp. 10 and 14

estranged support and that its 'strait-jacket application of Marxism….failed'.[30] Fundamentally, the 'story so far', though containing elements of truth, is misrepresentative and requires readjustment. The linguistic turn, the shift in modern history to a focus on the relations between language, language users and the environment, provides modern studies of the SDF with larger horizons.[31] Patrick Joyce's focus on language enables historians to add more layers to structural explanations and locate other forms of clarifications. Joyce concluded in *Visions of the People* that the labour movement had witnessed 'the limited penetration of socialism and of class independence and conflict was most evident'.[32] Parallel to this historical change, a re-emphasis on the importance of local histories has re-directed historians to re-investigate and re-interpret historical events from a more complex and nuanced perspective. James C Scott's anthropological study, *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), highlights the importance of local investigation. This multifaceted comprehension with the support of local enquiry has begun to reveal that a more thorough and graded approach to an investigation of the SDF can produce very different results.

The predominant historiographical interpretation of the SDF has utilized a national approach to the party. An executive viewpoint is understandable since a traditional approach to historical investigation 'normally' begins this way. Information from a 'general' perspective is more readily available and research only later demands specification. As Katrina Navickas notes, 'the natural tendency among many political and social historians is to gravitate towards protests and events that can easily be identified and categorised'.[33] Earlier historians, reflective of a certain approach to the past and comprehensible in their period of historical development, categorized and

[30] Chushichi Tsuzuki, 'The Impossibilist Revolt in Britain', *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 1, 1956, pp. 377-397

[31] Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class. Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 89. Gareth Stedman Jones' essay on class expression versus social control guarded historians of 'a real danger of over politicizing leisure' as an arena of struggle.

[32] Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People. Industrial England and the question of class, 1848-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 84, Patrick Joyce focused on language, keen to reveal how the early socialists sought to forge a language that would make working people no longer feel resigned.

[33] Katrina Navickas. 'What Happened to Class?' New histories of Labour and collective action in Britain, *Social History*, 36:2, 2011, p. 197

depicted a plausible, but one-dimensional picture of the SDF. Hobsbawm noted in 1961 that the party was never more than 'a sect rather than a serious political party'.[34] Kendall claimed the party was unsuccessful because it failed to create a constructive policy with the trade unions and because it had 'a rigid and mechanistic approach to social agitation'.[35] SDF men themselves contributed to the general pattern. Theodore Rothstein, who had been at odds with the party, claimed in singular style that the party had been curtailed by the political skill and sagacity of the English bourgeoisie who 'played a prominent part in fostering and shaping the opportunist ideology of the English proletariat'.[36] Rothstein sat on the SDF executive between 1901 and 1906, had correspondence with Lenin and was 'an important figure within British Marxism'.[37] Vitally, for this thesis, he was a world removed from the cotton mill activists of Lancashire. Invariably, historians have simplified the party as if it was one consistent entity and its leaders were autonomous protagonists directing party manoeuvres single-handedly. Chushichi Tsuzuki's biography of Hyndman unavoidably placed Hyndman centre-stage and others noted how 'Hyndman was a man whose success and failure mattered for socialism and for the British political system'.[38] Labels and epitaphs followed to pigeonhole the SDF. Tsuzuki labelled the party 'a tiny caravan of missionaries', reflecting the party's limited membership and perceived alienation of supporters. Pierson noted the group was, at best, 'a kind of conscience' for the labour movement', implying that the group was of little pragmatic significance.[39] Both interpretations are examples of the 'broad-sweep' historical approach, paying little or no heed to local studies. Navickas has emphasized that we need to provide more nuanced accounts of 'history from below' and her hints at working-class multiple identities guide us towards a methodology: 'particular protest events must be placed within deeper and more locational specific patterns of social conflict'.[40] In contrast to general histories, this study will attempt to answer the big-picture questions from the perspective of Lancashire mill towns, adding to the scope of understanding the SDF.

[34] E. J. Hobsbawm, 'Hyndman and The SDF', *New Left Review*, July/Aug, 1961, p. 70
[35] Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain*, p. 7
[36] T. Rothstein, *From Chartism to Labourism* (London: International Publishers, 1929), p. 266
[37] David Burke, 'Theodore Rothstein, Russian Emigre and British socialist', *Immigrant and Minorities*, 2:3, 1983, p. 97
[38] Royden Harrison, 'HM Hyndman and British Socialism', *Victorian Studies*, 5:2, 1961, pp. 165-167
[39] C. Tsuzuki, *H. M Hyndman and British Socialism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p.86.
[40] Navickas, 'What happened to class?', p.197.

Historians of labour history in Lancashire have also noted a distinct and sometimes contradictory socialist culture and the particular role the county played in the development of 'modern' society. Peter Firth's study of the Cooperative Association and the working class in Nelson reveals very real contradictions between the SDF and other workers' bodies. The SDF saw little value in the Cooperative, considering 'neither cooperation nor thrift can save the workman from the direful consequences of the capitalist system'.[41] With almost five million people living in the North West before the First World War, there came into being in Lancashire a civil society that exhibited new forms of behaviour that would become commonplace across Britain. The consolidation of class identities, the acceptance of urban life as the 'normal' environment, a slow decline in attachment to religious belief and the huge provision of goods and services, led to a commercialisation of popular culture and an increase in politics of new groups of the population. This local investigation will show the SDF in a new light. Not as one homogenous political party run by H.M. Hyndman and dedicated to Marxism but as an array of semi-autonomous SDF branches. These 'island' branches were notably distinct and different to the party executive. First, their political responses and actions were often driven and defined by 'first-hand' local issues and events and not necessarily a political ideology. Second, the men and women who were SDF activists were key in determining political reactions and many responses were, in contrast to existing historiography, made in close cooperation with trade unions and other socialist groupings.

Mill Town Environments

More investigation into the historical literature reveals how influential both town cultures and local individuals would be in the progress of branches. Jeffrey Hill's review of the SDF in the county, outlined some influential features that this thesis supports.

[41] Peter Firth, '*The Cooperative and the Working Class 1870-1914'*, (1990), ref M97, Nelson Library, p.p. 84-86

Hill noted that early SDF Marxist teleology overlooked the complex cultural relationships between workers themselves and between workers and bosses, a significant factor that raises 'doubts about the region's potential for sudden radicalization'.[42] Hill also noted, especially in Burnley, the long embittered struggle between the SDF and the Liberal Party, and how this confrontation established a pattern of workers' politics that saw the workers' vote split between Hyndman and Fred Maddison in the 1906 election. A subsequent period of unemployment and the culmination of a Lib/Lab pact convinced many socialists that confrontation rather than accommodation was the way forward. Quite correctly, Hill concluded that Lancastrian SDF members were flexible and cooperative with other socialist groupings and that within the SDF there was 'a marked contrast in style between the centre and the periphery'.[43]

The specific mill town environment in Lancashire would also be a significant factor that worked against branch success and deterred workers from supporting socialism. Patrick Joyce has notably discussed a Lancastrian 'esprit de corps' between mill owners and workers and Peter Swain has outlined the continuity of a rich sporting culture that ultimately created the largest spectator sport in England, football, at the turn of the twentieth century.[44] A focus on hard work, respectability and immediacy embraced the Lancashire workforce and these social mores often worked against local SDF activists. Outside of London, Lancashire was the most successful county for the SDF in terms of membership and branches began to spring up in many mill towns from 1884 onwards. A local interpretation of the story of the SDF in Lancashire is a good place to begin a reassessment. The mill towns of this study, which provide the bulk of evidence, are Bolton, Rochdale, Burnley, and Nelson. Where and when appropriate, information has also been located in the towns of Accrington, Blackburn and Colne. Initially, towns were chosen based on early investigations as to where Lancashire SDF branches were

[42] Jeffrey Hill, *Popular Politics and Popular Culture in the Age of the Masses* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2014), p. 53
[43] Ibid., p. 71
[44] Peter Swain, 'Cultural Continuity and Football in Nineteenth-century Lancashire', *Sport in History*, 28:4, 2008, pp. 566-582

established and then pursued further as subsequent quantities of SDF information was identified. All towns were classed as 'mill towns' based on the majority of the workforce plying their trade in the cotton industry. The 1911 Census clearly reveals that Blackburn, Burnley and Rochdale had a huge majority of the workforce engaged in the cotton mills. Of working populations over the age of ten, Blackburn had 41,809 people out of a population of 108,442 working in mills. Burnley had 34,009 mill workers out of 85,832 and Rochdale 22,822 out of 74,693.[45] The only other occupations to employ a thousand workers or more were mining and metals jobs for men and domestic service for women. Other historical enquiry has also utilised the mill town categorisation. F.W.S. Craig designated Lancashire towns as 'cotton textile constituencies' in his study of electoral politics of spinners and weavers.[46]

Essentially, workers' interaction with industry and their political behaviour were dominated by a social code, which admired hard work, valued respectability and more often than not indulged in self-gratification. 'Working-class culture was still largely found at the pub, the club, the chapel or on the street, sitting on the doorstep or standing at the street corner'.[47] The life of a mill hand incorporated the acceptance of the 'half-time' system, a lack of emphasis on education and the specific interplay of relationships between mill workers and their notoriously conservative and male dominated weaving trade union leadership. Characterised by economic slumps and booms mill towns could simultaneously provide disposable income and examples of poverty. Knowing 'the weavers catechism' or going through the 'small sieve' were particular social mores induced by economic insecurity indispensable to a mill town workers' way of life. In contrast, the weavers' disposable income was an important factor in the growth and early maturation of more commercial forms of leisure, but it was also a point of difference between well-paid workers and those who received less. As Trevor Griffiths argues, political labour advancement was based more on the

[45] Census of England and Wales 1911, Occupations and Industries, Vol X Part II. P. 209-241
[46] Alan Fowler, 'Lancashire to Westminister: a study of cotton trade union officials and British labour 1910-39', *Labour History Review*, 64:1 Spring 1999, p. 14
[47] G. Trodd, *'Political Change and the Working-Class in Blackburn and Burnley 1880-1914'*, (unpublished PhD, University of Lancaster, 1978), p. 242

broader continuities underlying the class experience. An unideological Lancashire working class responded to a demonstrable capacity to further their interests in material, religious and industrial matters. In addition, alternative sources of identity could influence voters more than class, such as income, skill, neighbourhoods or religion.[48] So though one can perceive a specific mill town lifestyle, where sometimes mores and values coalesce, it is important to recognize that the mill towns possessed other influential aspects of social and industrial life that could divide workers and affect political choices. As Walton accurately concluded of Lancashire culture, 'its overriding characteristics were conservative and defensive, and its attachments were to the immediate, the tangible and the traditional'.[49] Always prepared to fight for issues that were financially dear to them, and not necessarily the SDF, the mill town workers provide this study with a complexity and at times a hurdle to SDF local politics.

Leisure

Running parallel with and influencing mill town culture, was the late nineteenth-century boom in sport and leisure, in particularly in Lancashire. Sport in late nineteenth-century mill towns exploded. The Football League and the Lancashire League (cricket) reflected this new forefront of cultural and social change introducing 'a shift in the social bearings of the communities in which these sportsmen performed their art'.[50] Other historians have also acknowledged that Lancashire had a unique and rapidly growing leisure environment wherein the relatively strong financial position of many cotton workers and their families formed a core of relatively content workers. Walton noted that 'Lancashire also spawned a great efflorescence of music hall' and claimed that 'the working-class seaside holiday as an extended visit lasting several days

[48] Trevor Griffiths, *The Lancashire Working Classes 1880-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), p. 332
[49] John K. Walton, *Lancashire a Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p. 358
[50] Hill, *Popular Politics and Popular Culture,* p. 22

… was almost a Lancashire invention'.[51] The Lancastrian picture at a glance is awash with burgeoning examples of consumerism and leisure.

To account for the effects of sport and leisure on the mill towns, historians have provided an array of scenarios. John Hargreaves outlined features specific to British socialism, which disabled socialists from adequately grasping the significance of sport in popular culture. Hargreaves noted how aspects of British socialism, its anti-intellectualism, nationalism and traditional connection to religion, were responsible for 'the impression of greyness and of sanctimoniousness that is so often conveyed by British socialism'.[52] Hargreaves went on to note sociopolitical constraints on British socialism such as the gradual and sequential development of sport and the accommodation of sport in commercialization, all of which led to a civil society that inhibited the kind of class polarization and politicization of culture that occurred on the Continent. As Hargreaves concluded, 'British socialism cannot be said to have failed with sport because, in retrospect, it never seriously tried'.[53] In Lancashire, the lack of active or recorded SDF engagement with workers in arenas of sport and leisure appears to support Hargreaves's claim.

Stephen G Jones added weight to the argument that the booming leisure industry had influenced the workers significantly. Jones identified a new working-class consciousness, but one built on three features: a profound sense of separateness; a powerful moral code based on fairness; and a readiness to fight for 'just' treatment. Jones noted, though, that 'rather than fight for revolutionary change, working class culture was simply an alternative to bourgeois society, seeking to work and adapt within it, but not overthrow it'.[54] Sport, the music hall, drink and play, appeared to be more disabling for socialism than first thought. 'The unity between socialism and

[51] Walton, *Lancashire a Social History,* p. 295
[52] John Hargreaves, 'Sport and Socialism in Britain', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, Vol 9, 1992, pp. 138- 143
[53] Ibid., p. 150
[54] Stephen G Jones. *Sport Politics and the Working Class* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 24

recreation was seemingly eclipsed by the development of a mass leisure industry'.[55] Chris Waters added some complexity to the argument. Waters argued that socialist failure was dependent upon the existence of discursive constraints on activists' imagination. Noticeably, discussing Burnley and Blackburn, Waters did not overlook that there were often two working-class cultures, that of the skilled and the unskilled, and that the latter was less inclined to respond to socialist entreaties of self-improvement. Jeffrey Hill added to this multifaceted interpretation of workers' divisions. In discussing the unified nature of FA Cup Final homecomings, Hill points out that these organised events of town unity 'sought a magical resolution of the many internal tensions and conflicts that in fact beset the communities'.[56] Hill concluded that these events 'reveal an all-too-keen awareness of the actual disharmonies present in the everyday life of Northern towns'.[57]

The socialists' response to this rapidly changing social environment was left wanting. The SDF itself had understood the challenge to some extent. Ernest Belfort Bax described leisure, not religion, as the new opiate of the workers and SDF member H. W. Hobart recognised in Salford in the 1890s that 'in the great majority of cases the British workmen makes very bad use of his leisure'.[58] In the SDF stronghold of Burnley, Waters noted that socialists roundly attacked the growth of cinemas and other popular entertainments, 'slowly repudiating the values they [workers] cherished' and no significant evidence has surfaced during this investigation of SDF activists in the Lancashire towns to reveal any significant SDF engagement in workers' sport and leisure. [59]

If we accept Waters's argument that SDF socialists were in many ways prisoners of their own cultural discourse, then the lack of engagement in the leisure arena

[55] Ibid., p. 35
[56] Hill, *Popular Politics,* p. 238
[57] Ibid., p. 240
[58] Chris Waters. *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture*, 1884-1914 (Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 7
[59] Ibid., p. 178

inevitably leads one to question how many activists actually ever fully understood the culture of the workers they were trying to convert. Ross McKibbin emphasised the challenges the SDF were facing. McKibbin highlighted that the structure of the workforce, with many small-scale industrial organisations and a distinct element of individualism, actually discouraged 'sameness'. These workers did not feel excluded from society and had inherited deep values and traditions such as nationalism, deference and even a strong belief in the free trade fiscal system.[60] McKibbin noted that a socialist culture was inhibited by rising wages, religion and because Britain developed a working class that 'bred dogs and pigeons, grew flowers, raised canaries, founded angling-clubs and cycling societies, put the factory or local football team together', and therein dispersed their political energies 'amongst a profusion of associational activities which as a rule, were not' party political.[61] The explosion of commercial leisure at the beginning of the twentieth century coupled with a myriad of distractions would suggest that McKibbin's argument is worthy of more consideration.

Leisure and socialization played a significant role in influencing workers and could undermine SDF success. As Matthew Hilton noted in his book on twentieth-century market consumption, 'consumerism as a historical movement might not have been the 'ism' that won, but it is fair to say that its organization and proselytisers have been almost as crucial to the dynamo of change as workers, voters, employers and citizens'.[62]

[60] Ross McKibbin. 'Why was there no Marxism in Great Britain', *The English Historical Review*, 99, 1984, p.322.
[61] Ibid., p.309.
[62] Matthew Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 24

Localism

In a critique of Crick's work, Hill gave us clues as to what a local investigation of the SDF could provide. Hill acknowledged that what we knew was still minimal and noted several important oversights. Crick had by-passed the question of certain places and their propensity, or not, to produce socialist movements. He had paid little attention to the significance of individuals within local movements. He had disregarded the extent to which the SDF had fashioned a counter-culture to dominant capitalism and consumerism, and most significantly, whether this counter culture in itself had been undermined by the ideological effect of leisure. As Hill noted, our understanding of labour politics might better be enhanced by 'examining the processes that produced Manchester United and Coronation Street'.[63] Crick's conclusions had taken one very particular understanding of the 'political party', a top-down approach and ignored the details of ordinary branch members, their motivations and their hindrances. This leaves a gap in the history of the SDF that requires filling. The gap of who it was at grass roots that made the tea, stood outside the factory gates and interacted with the ordinary people. Crick had challenged some of the earliest evaluations of the SDF but there remains much to be done as knowledge of individual towns and the SDF organizers and orators within them remains sparse.

Numerous historians have called for more grass roots investigation of the SDF. In investigating the ILP, David Howell noted that 'rigid demarcations were the property of national leaders and historians' and quite naturally this same reference to simplistic distinctions can and has been applied erroneously to the SDF.[64] In a study of the SDF, Graham Johnson went further along this path, arguing that despite 'all of its faults and limitations' the SDF was 'not restrictive of political activity, but enabling in a way that

[63] Jeffrey Hill, 'Requiem for a Party', *Labour History Review*, 61:1, 1996, p.108.
[64] D Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p.212.

post 1917 theory often could not be'.[65] In Johnson's words, he was attempting to alleviate the 'condescension of posterity' from the SDF.[66] Johnson was perhaps indicating that one ought to be commending the SDF for laying the foundations for the only 'socialist' alternative, the Labour Party. Yet Johnson digs no further, he makes no investigation of language, gender and media and ultimately centres his analysis on the party leadership. This study will go beyond the 'Executive interpretation' of the SDF and provide an insight into the lives of SDF activists. In 2004, David Young put forward his triangular 'People Place and Party' perspective in analysing the SDF. This approach noted the need for more localized analysis. Young argued that political journeys of activists, in locality and as collective biographies, ought to receive more attention. He stated that 'a collective study of these journeys can also tease out 'processes' within an organisation' and 'a longitudinal study of activism which includes the idea of the 'political journey' could well help to underpin party politics in the future'.[67] Young had foreseen the need for more study of a prosopographical nature, a gap that this study has recognized and hopes to fill.

Central to this study is a recognition of the limitations of the 'top-down' perspective. The SDF was not one cohesive standardised unit but a party with many different perspectives and opinions across many different issues. In 2011, Mark Bevir could still assert that "the plot is tragic".[68] Yet the SDF story has made some progress.[69] However, the point remains that no single SDF study has yet to take place in one county, covering several different towns, with a 'bottom up' focus. Naturally, Hyndman and the SDF leadership have been copiously scrutinized in the past and accusations of dogmatism, idiosyncratic flaws and alien creed are levelled and countered at the party vis a vis the actions of these leaders. Statements reflecting the party's position are invariably taken from party leader H.M. Hyndman, *Justice* editor Harry Quelch, or

[65] G. Johnson, 'Social Democratic Politics in Britain 1881-1911. The Marxism of the SDF', (unpublished PhD, University of Hull, 2000), p.302.
[66] Ibid., p. 304.
[67] David M Young, 'People Place and Party: The SDF 1884-1911', (unpublished PhD, University of Durham, 2003), p. 101
[68] Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism*, p.106.
[69] Crick, *The History of the SDF*, 'In Britain there was an existing working-class culture, based on sports,religious affiliation and hobbies, which competed with party political action', p. 291

Belfort Bax. Moreover, these representations have been misunderstood necessitating further study of the SDF more generally. However, it is the study of the local that provides insight. The fledgling workers' group, the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), which was initialised as an alliance of trade union and socialist groupings in February 1900, quickly revealed national fissures. When the LRC refused to accept an SDF position in 1901, a pivotal moment in SDF history, Quelch uttered his personal negative response: 'When two men ride together on horseback one must ride behind'.[70] In contrast, Burnley, Rochdale and Blackburn branches adopted a defiant position against the SDF executive in support of a Labour Party alliance. Ironically, the author of *Social Democracy* and long-term secretary of the SDF, H. W. Lee, would acknowledge thirty years later 'I am now convinced and have been for a good many years that this decision was a sad mistake'.[71] Examples of Lancashire branch members with different viewpoints are numerous. Burnley SDF leader, Dan Irving, clashed with the SDF leadership on more than one occasion, noting in the *North East Lancashire and Labour News* that 'we have not underestimated the power of more insidious foes within our own household'[72]. This leads us to reassess our interpretation of the SDF and look more closely at what activists did and to what extent that diverged and reflected the SDF.

Navickas argues that 'collective action' needs to be placed within a more contextually rich environment, wherein longer local patterns of tension, press influence and unrest may well exist and have an impact.[73] This is an investigative approach not yet applied to the study of the SDF. In the mill towns focused on in this study, I have investigated local SDF events and attempted to explain the unique SDF mill town environments and particular circumstances of each town. This provides a ground level perspective of the SDF not yet seen. H. M. Hyndman contested and lost four separate elections in Burnley. He noted the people there were not 'in any sense poor or depressed people…

[70] Ibid., p.187
[71] H. W. Lee, *Social Democracy in Britain* (London: SDF Publishing, 1935), p. 158
[72] *North East Lancashire Labour News*, 1 June 1894.
[73] Katrina Vavickas, 'What Happened to Class?', p. 197

and altogether, being besides shrewd and fairly well-educated.[74] Educated or not, Burnley workers rejected Hyndman four times but would elect Irving three times in a row in 1918, 1922 and 1923. Hyndman, the top-hatted 'gentleman' outsider was usurped by local activist Irving. Thirty years of politics had given Irving the label 'respectable' and provided the Labour Party with a suitable candidate. The actions and results of these election contests can only be understood when placed in their relative, individual, and above all, local context. This latest methodology though still requires us to be guarded and to link the 'collective action' of the local to the bigger picture and explain the interaction between the two. This will demonstrate where undoubted disunity occurred between the branches and the executive and show a political party that was made of many more complex strands than what the broad sweep approach has shown so far. This provides SDF history with a perspective into differences between the local and the national concealed until now.

Moving away from the oversimplifications and focusing on local individuals, the mill towns unveil what James C Scott has referred to as 'everyday resistance'.[75] Examining why H. M. Hyndman lost the Burnley parliamentary election in 1906 by a mere 356 votes and why SDF Bolton member J. Shufflebotham was left divorced and bankrupt, combines national and local to add to the sum of our meagre SDF knowledge. From a broader perspective, local investigations add to our understanding of how nineteenth-century political cultures operated and reveal that the SDF executive and its branches were often separate entities. They tell too that sometimes betting on a horse or catching the last train home was more important than socialism for local activists. These day-to-day events reflect a particular Lancashire history, where mill town workers conducted their lives with an emphasis on hard work, respectability and self-satisfaction. In addition, Andrew Gritt reminds us in *Family History in Lancashire* of the value of biographical research 'detailed life histories are important, if only to demonstrate the diversity of experience'.[76] This study has utilised several mini

[74] Hyndman, *Further Reminiscences*, p. 60
[75] James C Scott, *Weapons of The Weak* (New Haven: Yale University, ACLS Publishing, 2013).
[76] Andrew, Gritt, *Family History in Lancashire. Issues and Approaches* (Newcastle, Cambridge scholar Press, 2009), p.18

biographies in order to reflect an assortment of mill town experiences. These features show that Lancashire was a unique political and social setting that impacted specifically on the branches of the SDF. Events demonstrate how mill towns were often antithetical to SDF aspirations and that local SDF politics was guided more by first-hand events and circumstances than any dogmatic ideology. However, in the end and in contrast to accepted historiography, the 'little caravan' in Lancashire had activists who were energetic trade union members and more often than not were not so very different to the other socialists. As Frank Tanner noted of the Labour Party socialist resolution at the Hull conference in 1908, 'the party objective as set out in this resolution was identical, word for word, with that of the SDF'.[77]

The Branches

The SDF branches of Lancashire were a myriad of unique local groupings, which reflected the complexity of local politics. They often could be at odds with national politics and had their own varied successes and failures. These branches would reveal distinctive Lancastrian SDF characteristics. First, nearly all mill town branches implemented a flawed election strategy, more so in national than local politics. This incorporated a tactic I have labelled 'to fight the good fight', wherein the SDF attempted, with little recourse to an overall national strategy, to contest as many vacant electoral posts as possible with little success.

A second feature was the branches' strategical engagement in unemployment and free speech politics, an undertaking that led to much street politics and ultimately a further alienation of the party from mainstream support. Navickas emphasised the need to explore multiple working-class identities, 'particular protest events must be

[77] Frank Tanner, *British Socialism in the Early 1900's* (London: Socialist History Society, No. 35, 2014), p. 21

placed within deeper and more locationally specific patterns of social conflict'.[78] By investigating the local SDF activists' engagement in free speech and unemployment politics more patterns of conflict are discovered. What is revealed is that different mill town branches and local activists engage in political action because the opportunity occurs, the issue is particular to their town or the individual, and not necessarily the party, and activists made the issue a matter of unflinching principle with little or no coordination with the party executive. The SDF was anything but a single political entity and more a small core of struggling persistent individual 'islands'. Islands like Wardleworth West ward in Rochdale, who were represented by a SDF candidate four times from 1900-1920, would most certainly not consider themselves politically 'peripheral'.[79]

A third characteristic was a cultural impasse that existed between many of the SDF members and the mill town workers they were attempting to convert. A condescending critique of the workers and a lack of alternative social strategies to recruit or engage workers would injure the party meaningfully. Mill town cultures were very often steered by a code of respectability and daily concerns of immediacy. Buying a loaf of bread, finding a babysitter or having a pint, would be daily life. It was a position many SDF crusaders overlooked and found even harder to respond to effectively. Burnley SDF activist Dan Irving wanted to turn pubs into 'Peoples' Palaces' and Bolton colleague, Alan Clarke, attacked the weavers claiming they regarded children as 'wage-earning machines', 'the intemperate nature of Clarke's comments reveals the social distance which separated him from the mainstream of the Bolton working-class'.[80] Neither was the SDF position understood by nor did it find much support amongst the workers of the mill towns. Pubs were very popular spaces of social engagement and few workers would have appreciated Clarke's critique. Individual activists and their lives demonstrate that the SDF was in fact a multitude of socialisms racked by conflicting opinions and sometimes hindered by its inclination to

[78] Navickas, 'What Happened to Class?', p. 197
[79] Robert William Garner, *Municipal Liberalism in Rochdale 1880-1914*, Rochdale Local History Collection, Rochdale Library, 1983, p. 86-97
[80] Walton, *Lancashire a Social History*, p. 309

embourgeoisement. More importantly, these SDF activists rarely expounded Marxism and were motivated by first-hand local events. More often than not, leading activists were their very own Crusoe on every SDF island. Mill town SDF branch activities suggests that branch actions were most dependent upon one or two strong single personalities. This autonomy provided great advantage in that branches acted independently and without heed to the national executive. Yet, simultaneously, this strategy was a disadvantage in that little coordination existed between internal SDF branches and large united acts of SDF branch participation are rare. The SDF was not one united whole but a splintering of small autonomous groupings.

Within the 'general' interpretation of the SDF, there has also been a tendency to disregard the SDF as too small or irrelevant. This tendency to dismiss the SDF as of marginal importance misses the point about the labour movement as a large multiple entity. Just as Hobsbawm argued, with reference to the Communist Party, that we need to listen to 'the dog that didn't bark'; we ought to listen to the local noises of the branches of the SDF.[81] It would likewise be remiss of any historian not to acknowledge that the eventual success of the Labour Party was, to some extent, based upon the many years of socialist agitation prior to 1914, a period in which the SDF played an integral and active part. In Steven Fielding's review of James Hinton's *Shop Floor Citizens*, Fielding unearthed two more motives to dig deeper into the history of the SDF. First, localized studies bring historians closer than ever to the actual 'truth' about working-class politics and second, because as Hinton himself conceded in his study of workers, 'most workers were not interested in the issue'.[82] This lack of interest in socialist politics is still as relevant today as it was in the 1890s. This study will add another layer of explanation as to why this was so in Lancashire and what distracted the workers from not wishing to implement the socialist revolution.

[81] Harriet Jones, 'Is the CPGB History Important'*, Labour History Review*, Vol 67, No 3, December 2002, p. 1

[82] Steven Fielding, 'British Communism. Interesting but Irrelevant', *Labour History Review*. 60:2, 1995, p. 122

Beginning to comprehend what SDF activists actually did and how this is turn was dependent upon unique local factors, is the point where we start to realize that Hyndman, Quelch and Bax were not 'normal' representatives of the party. This argument links the 'collective action' of the local to the bigger picture and explains the interaction between the two. Local history demonstrates where disunity occurred between the branches and the executive and unveils a political party that was made of many more complex strands than what the broad sweep approach has shown. The separate nature of the SDF mill town branches and their activists was investigated by Stephen Yeo. Yeo noted how SDF members' motivational rationale for participating in the party was varied. H. W. Newson acted out of shamed sympathy, H. W. Hobart acted because he had found the 'new gospel' and Joseph Toole because joining the socialists 'was a sincere and sacred thing'.[83] The individuals located in this study would be influenced by a host of factors; from membership numbers to crucial financial capabilities. Importantly, this study reveals that the individual leadership qualities of the local SDF organiser and his/her ability to speak to large audiences and challenge the local authority, would be one of the key issues which would influence the success of SDF branches.[84] Burnley and its district provides the study with half a dozen active SDF members whose personal stories highlight key issues. In particular, the irrepressible Dan Irving, the SDF leader in Burnley, is a fundamental figure in the study because he represents three aspects of an individual SDF man that were required to be successful. The ability to negotiate and create fair alliances, the ability to persevere over decades, and crucially, the ability to have years of internal political actions characterised as sufficiently 'respectable' and non-radical, that workers and the Labour Party would support him. Unlike so few SDF activists, Irving finally was elected to parliament in 1918, officially as a member of the Labour Party, unofficially as a spokesman for the SDF. A better understanding of the actions of the party is acquired when each individual in a SDF island is understood and accepted as one agent of party action.

[83] Stephen Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain 1883-1896', *History Workshop Journal*, IV 1977, p.13.
[84] Lawrence Chew, 'Dan Irving and Socialist Politics in Burnley 1880-1924', *North West Labour History*, Issue 23, 1998/99, p. 7

Methodology

The Social Democratic Federation (SDF) chose officially to re-name themselves the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in 1906. For the sake of simplicity and understanding, this study has chosen to use the iteration SDF throughout the thesis to describe the party. Our period of study provides several academic challenges covering thirty years and several towns. Evidence available for each town is very often, at best, a snapshot of a certain branch history at one particular time. To overcome this patchy accessibility to evidence I chose to implement a thematic approach to the study to utilize and correlate the evidence at my disposal without having to omit data. A good example of these fleeting changes can be found in the machinations of the Burnley Trades Council, a body formed at the Sun Inn in 1882 and dominated originally by the president of the Burnley Weavers President, the Liberal David Holmes. On formation, the trades council went to great length to denounce any interest in politics. The same body on the eve of the First World War had the SDF leader Dan Irving as a prominent member. Now the council was thrusting forward an agenda that was interpreted as socialist by opponents and included the 'feeding of necessitous children'.[85] Utilizing singular events along SDF mill town branch timelines as themes instead of simply local events, I have been able to extrapolate greater meaning and still relate local comprehension. This approach, when placed together as a whole, provides a larger Lancastrian history of the SDF branches. It also illustrates how the SDF was greatly influenced by the social and cultural environment it worked within and was extant in Lancashire for forty years.

A lack of primary source materials may be one of the reasons why many studies have tended to be top-down in structure. In an attempt to overcome this, a lot of my research has been based on newspapers and the records of local Lancashire libraries.

[85] *Burnley Labour Jubilee News*. 1950. P1.

Newspaper analysis has been a corner stone of the research and has divulged events, personalities and language, from the storming of town hall doors to verbatim accounts of political debates. As Edward Royle pointed out, posing the questions who, when and why anything was published in nineteenth-century newspapers requires a 'healthy scepticism' and an understanding that the radical press were prone to exaggerate their movements importance and the ordinary press more likely to underestimate or ignore free thought.[86] Reconstructing the complex, contradictory, and multiple relationships newspapers have with their readers is difficult with the best evidence. Royle and Aled Jones make a distinct claim that editors of local newspapers held key and influential positions in society, 'he typified both the transformations that were making Britain an urban nation and a stable society'.[87] A natural bias of an established or Liberal press in Lancashire during the period of study is an aspect not overlooked in this interpretation. Typical of the mill town newspapers was the *Nelson Leader*, 'owned by the Coulton family and dating from the early 1890s, from which time it rivalled and supplanted older titles such as the *Colne and Nelson Times* and then *Nelson Chronicle*, though Liberal in inclination'.[88]

This study utilises several prosopographical reports to give colour to the life of SDF activists and show that the local and the nuanced add to our understanding of what the SDF was in Lancashire, which in conclusion is a very different picture to the one drawn by history thus far. Undoubtedly, questions remain unanswered and room for further study of SDF branches in other areas and towns may well enhance further our understanding of this complex political party and indeed the labour movement as a whole. Family histories have also provided the study with several in-depth accounts of SDF members and although most revealing and insightful, such accounts must always be utilised carefully as recollections and partiality is not overlooked with personal interpretations. Much information relating to Burnley SDF members, John Sparling and

[86] Larel Blake, Aled Jones and Lionel Madden, *Investigating Victorian Journalism* (Oxford: Macmillan Press, 1990), Edward Royle, p. 52
[87] Ibid., Aled Jones, p. 66
[88] Stephen Constantine, *'Town and City Histories',* Chapter 3, Jeffrey Hill, 'Nelson Politics, Economy, Community', (Keele: Keele University Press, 1997), p. 52

John Widdup, has not been used because it was unverifiable or irrelevant to the topic. Information that has been implemented has been either cross-checked with newspaper data or supported by another source. Primary evidence in the form of minutes, diaries, accounts, and personal records of a broad section of Lancashire trade unions has provided information relating day-to-day occurrences. Though sometimes of limited relevance to the SDF branches, these primary sources often supported secondary information and are key to understanding the specific Lancashire context that the SDF men operated in. Archival materials informed of several SDF men representing weaver unions and provided an overall perspective of a weaving industry in a constant state of minor bickering and confrontation. A proliferation of minor disputes and extensive work done by local union officials, some of whom were SDF members, characterised the Lancashire area.

The limited number of sources specifically related to the SDF, intermittent SDF branch histories and a reliance on newspaper reports has created obstacles and compelled the thesis to focus on a thematic approach. This inevitably leaves the 'stories' of the selected branches of this thesis incomplete and leaves the historical interpretation far from whole. However, the documentation that was located and utilized has certainly provided sufficient historical support and linear coordination to add to the limited amount of general history purported up until now. Above all, the endorsing nature of much local and individual history has supported the main arguments in the thesis. Reading of SDF membership being rescinded for drunkenness and of paternal employers organizing excursions for workers, reminds that the nature of political allegiances was never straightforward and that individual interaction, the basis of all politics, nearly always requires some form of qualification. These small extracts lead more to an understanding that the Lancashire context was of primary significance in shaping the branches of the SDF. Investigating individual histories in the mill towns has revealed in every case a different story, which combined, increases our SDF understanding of both local and national histories and reminds of the interplay of such events on each other.

The next chapter of the thesis examines the mill town SDF branches in action. Individual agency reflects much of mill town activism and reveals that 'the party' was often the actions and deliberations of one or two single individuals. Established within town trades councils the Liberals would compete against socialists over 'progressive' political programmes and prove to be a noteworthy political opponent. Such was the intense competitive nature of Lancastrian Liberalism that acrimony between the Liberals and the SDF would be fraught with insult and invectives. Paternalism, though of a much more amorphous nature, existed and neighbourhood allegiances and workers' support for local charitable mill owners and politicians pepper the Lancashire newspapers. A questionable electioneering strategy, a vociferous press, and controversial SDF street politics would witness SDF members receiving prison sentences and becoming alienated, which would result in a lack of votes for the SDF and more support for the respectable law-abiding ILP and Labour Party. The rise of the Labour Party after 1900 presented itself as the most serious of 'pretenders' to the socialist call and would challenge the SDF across Lancashire. That Labour became the only 'socialist' party to win election seats in 1914 was resultant from a process of indirect efforts of the SDF activists and simultaneously the future pattern of their long-term assimilation.

The third chapter of the study concentrates on the issue of socialisation and leisure. Entertainment and consumerism marched hand in hand into the early twentieth century and impacted the mill town environments significantly. For mill town workers in Lancashire, whose worldview would have been restricted in the nineteenth century to the local area and national news delivered via the printed press, access to information and travel increased significantly, now weavers could suddenly travel to the seaside or lend a book from the town library. Additional money in weekly wage packets was counted carefully and placed into new norms and traditions that cotton towns were developing; a trip to the pub on Friday night or half-day free on Saturday to go and watch the football. Poignantly, then, and for a long time since, none would

fully understand that one of the greatest enemies of the SDF was sat under their noses; probably in a music hall seat, drinking a pint and wondering where to go on holiday. When Stuart Macintyre made his reference to the un-class conscious cartoon character Henry Dubb, he noted two facets of difficulty: 'Marxists were dealing not just with apolitical Henry Dubbs but with Labour Henry Dubbs'.[89] Years on further facets could be added to understand the reluctant Mr Dubbs.

The fourth chapter is an investigation of female SDF activists and their interaction with Lancashire weavers. A task made difficult because the reputation and statements of Belfort Bax, a leading SDF theoretician, have often been utilized to tar the entire SDF party with the 'sexist' label. However, it was Karen Hunt who informed that the SDF equivocated over the women's question and a 'conscience' only approach reflected 'the party's difficulty in challenging preconceptions of the sexual division of labour'.[90] The Lancastrian mill town patterns reveals intricacy that the broad-stroke interpretation too easily overlooks. Localism reveals that Lancashire possessed several prominent female socialist activists during the period, some belonging to the SDF, others the ILP, some the suffragette movement and some women belonged to one or two organisations simultaneously. The role these women played in political events provide a narrative of who these women were and mirror the character and diversity of the party. Ada Nield Chew's *Letters of a Factory Girl* and Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's fight against the Workers Educational Association were often individual and not 'party' acts of socialist resistance. Moreover, these female activists highlight how the female weavers they tried to convert had their own very particular Lancastrian priorities, ones that valued immediacy and economic independence and not social salvation. As Jon Lawrence noted in *Speaking For The People*, 'to what extent the SDF was representative of its constituents' is a key factor in developing our understanding of the relationship between women weavers and the SDF.[91] This investigation has found

[89] Stuart Macintyre, 'British Labour, Marxism and Working Class Apathy in the Nineteen Twenties', *The Historical Journal*, 20:2, June 1977, p. 490
[90] Karen Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists. The SDF and the woman question 1884-1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge press, 2002), p. 235
[91] Jon Lawrence, *Speaking For The People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1998), p.263

that Lancastrian SDF women could be both representative and disregarded. Though Selina Cooper and Ethel Holdsworth had both worked as weavers, it was Cooper who adhered sufficiently to mill town cultural mores to be heard and Holdsworth the more extreme and less successful. Yet, categories of women existed who were divorced from the socialist struggle, sometimes because of poverty, sometimes because of apathy and sometimes because voting at the trade union meeting was 'enough' political engagement. The SDF women were prompted by first-hand issues and possessed an unrestricted ability to take their own decisions. What successful SDF females actually achieved in their local communities and how this differed or not to the party line, and the culture of the weavers, provides a better understanding of the SDF branches and reveals that support from workers was often determined by individuals interacting with immediate issues at hand in the local community.

This thesis fills a gap of knowledge left untapped by national and general histories. The SDF 'island' branches, conditioned by the mill towns' environments were influenced primarily by basic individual needs and demands, sometimes by chance, often by leisure and finally politics. Second, the same SDF branches were impeded and hindered by material distractions, which revealed themselves in the huge explosion of commercial entertainment at the end of the nineteenth century. This lunge for leisure was exacerbated by a mill town culture of 'immediacy', coupled with a general SDF weakness to assess and appreciate what this growing workers' culture was and how it could be harnessed to the cause of revolutionary socialism, if ever at all. This thesis will show that the SDF as a political grouping was much more complicated than hitherto acknowledged. In contradiction to the often accepted postulation of SDF failure, I will show that the mill town environment and the mill town SDF branches had an effect on local politics and the labour movement as a whole. Though not successful in parliamentary general elections, the SDF succeeded against all odds in some municipal elections and was involved in many acts of political agency and education throughout the period of study. From the acquisition of a bowling green for the workhouse in 1900 by Blackburn SDF, to the organisation of unemployment demonstrations across the county, the SDF branches were a hive of political activity. Liberalism and weak political

strategies undermined the SDF appeal but the party did not stop fighting, and to the credit of its branches, created a counter-culture that, in some instances, was successfully adaptable. A small political pamphlet produced by the Burnley SDF in 1912 informed readers that 'If you want to join the Labour Party, JOIN THE SDF!'[92] It would not be an exaggeration to claim that the SDF, in its near thirty-year history in Lancashire, undoubtedly contributed and developed a socialist culture, which in turn would lead to more socialists, which inevitably would lead to the only socialist alternative, the Labour Party, winning its highest number of seats in the general election of 1918.

In looking at the SDF in Lancashire we are acknowledging that the fate of the party was intrinsically linked to the history of the county and that lessons from this study adds to knowledge of a political party but also to the social cultural and economic facets of Lancashire at just this period of time. No SDF study thus far has concentrated on one county and a localized approach. David Young referred to the study of the SDF as being 'too monochromic'.[93] It is high time to put some colour on the SDF pallet. Interpretations of the SDF as a political party to date are narrow and based primarily on the leadership of the party. This study uncovers local SDF actions that differ markedly from the one-dimensional national perspective. These multiple branch identities provide an insight into the SDF as an active political party and answer questions about why the party started, developed and ultimately dissolved into the Labour Party. This study adds to the existing debates by showing that the SDF was a complex entity, often directed by one or two local and vigorous personalities. The party was affected and derailed, not just by internal in-fighting and ineffective electoral strategies, but by a growing Labour Party, a crumbling wall of Liberalism and a tsunami of modern commercialism. Yet, in the end, despite all the setbacks and lack of Parliamentary success, the SDF had an intrinsic value. Fighting in the street, supporting industrial action and standing for local elections would, like any relentless message, be heard and repeated by the next inheritors of the mantle of the Left. By

[92] Burnley Library, SDF Notes and memorabilia, Ref SDF/1
[93] Young, 'People, Place and Party', p.96.

1923, every town in this study would have elected a Labour Party MP. Robert Blatchford's Lancastrians of 'ale and clogs' were perhaps acquiring expectations that suited their respectable ambitions after all? This was in part because one little socialist party had simply refused to stop talking.

Chapter 2

Activities and Responses in Lancashire

Establishment

As the 1880s progressed, economic depression took its toll and for the first time the SDF turned its executive attention to Lancashire. A weavers' strike in Blackburn in 1884 was the initial fascination and within a short space of time, three members of the SDF executive were sent to support the weavers. When H.M. Hyndman and William Morris turned up in support, an estimated crowd of two thousand people turned out to listen.[1] Secretary of the SDF, H. W. Lee, enthused that when Hyndman and Morris addressed about 2,000 persons were in the Exchange Hall: 'this meeting by their hearty applause showed that…they [workers] were beginning to discover the real cause of their poverty'.[2] Despite the strike being unsuccessful, this foray into Lancashire was to become part of early SDF strategy. The SDF Executive interpreted strikes as a distraction to their main political purpose, but saw these occasions as opportunities to engage mass crowds of workers, spread propaganda and ultimately establish branches. Shortly after the Blackburn strike, *Justice* noted that 'the field is a large one and not the least promising part is Lancashire´.[3] The establishment of SDF branches in Lancashire highlights the inadequacies of national and general historical studies. Local histories remind of the vital importance of individual agency and that small cores of SDF activists existed alongside ILP groupings in Lancashire. The establishment of SDF activity and progress in the Lancashire mill towns would often be determined by a number of interrelated factors: industrial strife; the strength of the conventional political parties; and the degree of cooperation between the SDF and the

[1] Martin Crick, *The History of The Social Democratic Federation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), p.35.
[2] Dona Torr, *Tom Mann and His Times* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1956), p.239.
[3] *Justice*, 1 March 1884.

ILP. Significantly, many local trades council leaders would align themselves with the Liberals and opposition to SDF progress came from working men or Lib/Lab politicians who saw Liberalism and not socialism as the best way forward for working men. The founding of the SDF mill town branches was characterised by local complications and a very particular political mill town environment affected their establishment.

The establishment and development of the Lancastrian branches of the SDF provides early indicators of how local politics would not abide to a simple national demarcation and how the nature of the party would be characterised by complexity and local circumstances specific to each town. To talk of a single SDF party entity misses the complexity of local necessity and the reality of the party in action. With a population of 34,381 in 1861, Burnley had boomed to 97,043 by 1901.[4] Immigrants had arrived at the later end of the century, primarily from the West Riding of Yorkshire and Cornwall, and the number of firms 'engaged in spinning or weaving rose from 53 in 1852 …. to 110 by 1886'.[5] As one contemporary commentator noted, 'weaving is not only the means of subsistence of the people but appears to be the raison d'etre of their existence'.[6] Cotton and coal shaped the town and the locations for mills and factories. In total there were fifteen coal pits run by three coal companies, the largest being the Exors of Colonel Hargreaves, controlled by the Thursby family since the early nineteenth century.[7] A reputation for lower weavers' wages and a status for excessive 'driving' led the *Cotton Factory Times* to describe Burnley as 'the Gradgrinds of the cotton industry…about the most grasping and penurious in the four counties'.[8] Historians have suggested that 'with unfailing regularity the textile towns were among those annually listed as having 1 in 4 or 1 in 5 die before reaching the age of 12

[4] G. Trodd, 'Political Change and the Working Class in Blackburn and Burnley, 1880-1914', (unpublished thesis, University of Lancaster, 1978), p.11.
[5] Ibid., p.25.
[6] Ibid., p.38.
[7] Ibid., p.37.
[8] *Cotton Factory Times*, 27 November 1891.

months…paying a tax which must be reckoned, not in £ s d, but in years, months and days.'[9]

Into this grim mill town environment arose the SDF in November 1891. Over the course of two meetings, the Burnley branch was formed at St James Hall on Church Street. Chairman T. Lambert addressed a meeting, stating how 'the SDF in Burnley had a remarkable history. It was started about six or eight weeks since with about forty members and now they numbered over 120. This was a remarkable fact, and another remarkable fact was that they meant business'.[10] At the crowded meeting, H. W. Hobart preached about the right to be discontented and Blatchford, from the *Clarion*, talked of palliatives that were required to change society. In just one year, the party had opened a library and was fighting municipal elections in three Burnley wards.[11] Early election performances were affected by the complexities of local politics and the unexpected interventions of life. J. Roberts lost to an 'Independent' candidate in Burnley Wood, 702 votes to 320.[12] Thomas Etherington lost to a Liberal in Stoneyholme ward 193 to 469 but not without some due cause. 'Mr. Etherington has been very ill of late and although he turned out yesterday morning, he was looking far from well'.[13] John Leeming lost to a Conservative candidate in Gannow Ward 438 to 562. Leeming's true political allegiances are difficult to ascertain, but it would appear that in this particular case, both the SDF and Liberals worked together. 'Mr Leeming came out on his own account evidently relying on the miners' vote. In addition to this, he had the help of a good many Liberals in the ward, though he was not officially supported by the party'.[14] A similar set of circumstances were enacted in Rochdale in 1898. The socialist alliance in Rochdale was strong enough to include a candidate in Wardleworth West, who labelled himself simply as 'Catholic'. 'No doubt an agreement had been reached between the parties with the result that Catholics were to support

[9] Marjorie Cruickshank, *Children and Industry:Child Health and Welfare in north-west Textile Towns During the Nineteenth- Century (*Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), p.145.
[10] *Burnley Gazette*, 23 December 1891.
[11] *Workman's Times*, 24 September 1892.
[12] *Burnley Express*, 2 November 1892.
[13] *Burnley Gazette*, 2 November 1892.
[14] *Burnley Gazette*, 2 November 1892.

Mr. Whittaker (socialist) in the hope that socialists would vote for Mr. Tierney (Catholic) in Wardleworth West ward'.[15] Political bargaining and negotiation at the level of ward politics, not possible at national level, was possible in the mill towns because activists often cooperated and had members who were also trade unionists. However, the nature of SDF municipal strategy could still be undermined by circumstances. The late candidature of James Hannah (socialist) in Castleton Ward East exemplified the maverick nature of local elections. 'Mr Hannah entered the contest on his own account, and without official backing by the socialist organisation. Some of the socialists … thought more candidates ought to have been nominated'.[16] These early election meetings reveal the independent nature of local electioneering, wherein individuals could run on their own volition and where political groupings could make 'unholy' alliances to achieve a specific local aim. The simplistic national interpretation of the SDF as a single party entity is insufficient to explain the actions of a federal 'island' party in action in Lancashire.

In nearly all the mill towns, the SDF would be opposed and its progress checked by the cotton trade unions that many workers were already members of. By 1875, the population of Bolton had reached 92,800 and the town council consisted of 43 Conservatives and 13 Liberals. The textile industry 'employed 8,708 males and 11,353 females and the town had all the facilities of a modern industrial town, it also had over 350 beer sellers and innkeepers'.[17] The first representatives of the workers would spring from the textile unions. In Bolton, the Secretary of the Spinners Union, J.T. Fielding, would become the Secretary of the trades council in 1874 and Fielding's long political career began when he was elected top of the poll as a 'working class representative' in the School Board election of 1879. Fielding was a Conservative and represented the industrial elitism and contentment of many textile union leaderships. The Bolton spinners resolved in March 1895 that 'it is not advisable that trade unions

[15] *Rochdale Observer*, 3 November 1906.
[16] *Rochdale Observer*, 3 November, 1906.
[17] Paul Harris, 'Class Conflict. The Trade Unions and Working Class Politics In Bolton', (unpublished BA, University of Lancaster 1971), p.9.

in Lancashire should enter into Party politics'[18]. As in many mill towns, the Bolton Trades Council representatives would not be adherents to socialist ideology. Trade council representatives had a stake and a status in the existing order and 'the urge towards amicable arrangement, especially among the top elite, was strong'.[19] They would be inclined to aim at short-term industrial goals. Their conservative stance was expressed in their opposition to an unskilled worker's pay claim in 1892 and their unwillingness to support the ILP in local elections that same year.[20] Many believed, not without good cause, that the success of the textile trade would depend upon the 'happy relations of masters and men needed to be preserved and strengthened'.[21] This pattern of trade union conservatism, enhanced and encouraged by partial financial gains and a process of trade settlement, would be extant across the mill towns and would negatively affect SDF branch support.

SDF activists found themselves trying to establish a political foothold and branches in a political environment that already had workers' organisations determined to maintain the status quo. In 1887, an engineer's strike lured Tom Mann to Bolton. However, the size of Mann's task was made clear directly after the failed engineers' strike when local council elections took place in November 1887. Eight of the ten trades council candidates were elected and all six SDF candidates were soundly defeated in the wards. The SDF's best result was a third place in the Derby ward with J. Nightingale, a boot and shoe maker, receiving 374 votes in a contest where the winning candidate received 985 votes. Paul Harris has described the trade council candidates:

> In Exchange ward, Mr Finlay was manager of the 'Hope and Anchor' inn, headquarters of the strike committee, and a Liberal. So too was Mr Parkinson of Bradford ward, an ex-spinner who had taken over the 'Cotton Tree' tavern.

[18] David Howell, *British Workers and The Independent Labour Party 1888-1906* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), p. 60
[19] John Garrard, *Leadership and Power in Victorian Industrial Towns 1830-80* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), p. 162
[20] *Bolton Evening News*, 18 February 1892 & *Bolton Chronicle*, 24 September 1892.
[21] Ibid., p.15.

> Derby ward had two Conservative 'Labour' councillors, Horrocks and Booth, respectively a tripe dealer and a baker. Mr Holt of West ward was a newsagent, secretary of the Ratepayers Association and 'Liberal but not Radical', his fellow councillor, Hough, a Conservative 'Labour' man, had worked at Dobson and Barlow's (Engineering Factory) until becoming Chairman of the strike committee, from which he had moved on to manage the 'Falcon Inn'…. Finally, in North ward, Mr Kirkman was a 71 year old ex-Chartist and ex-handloom weaver, now a Liberal and tea-dealer.[22]

The fact that none of the men were socialists, and that they were 'conservative labour', non-radical and that three of them were publicans, indicates that the workers' representatives already held a political ground that was far from SDF socialism. The Lancashire environment, where the SDF was strongest outside of London, also provided a context that was particularly challenging as the existing political parties had already secured workers' support.

The life of a SDF activist was often dependent upon local circumstances and Tom Mann's experiences in Bolton reinforce this picture. From the very beginning, Mann experienced victimization, which in turn made it difficult for him to find work and support his family. Lack of money, both personally and in the branches was an important factor in hindering an agent of the party. Mann complained about J. Hunter Watts and the Manchester branch of the SDF. A promised twenty pounds financial help never came and Mann referred to Watts as 'handkerchief men who really don't care a damn for socialism'.[23] The lack of engagement of the SDF executive with a distinct political plan left decisions and initiatives in the sole hands of locals. No support in the field attributed to some of Mann's obvious disappointment with the SDF leadership. He expressed his disquiet at the SDF Executive: 'nationally I have lost hope as regards SDF though I am sanguine concerning one or two districts'.[24] The day-to-day interaction of personalities, some benign and some not, would also make the

[22] Harris, 'Class Conflict', p.31.
[23] Torr, *Tom Mann*, p. 256-257
[24] Ibid., p.254.

difference between success and failure. Eventually, Mann's news agency in Bolton got into financial difficulty. Struggling to sell *Justice,* Mann blamed the difficulty on another branch member, Phair, who was advocating a 'Socialist Workshop' approach to recruiting more members. Finally, after a visit to another SDF branch, Mann was accused by the Darwen SDF secretary of encouraging his members to align themselves with another organisation, the National Labour Electoral Association.[25] Shortly thereafter Mann left the Bolton branch. These personal interactions are all too often overlooked by national histories. The lack of tangible results, one's own personal doubts as to one's undertakings, the strength and resistance of other local leaders and access to money, were among a host of elements affecting the SDF's 'everyday resistance'. As Katrina Navickas reminded us, 'micro studies with close attention to social conflict in everyday life provide knowledge the national picture is unable to detect'.[26] In Tom Mann's case the factors, some of his own control some not, aligned to defeat him and his experiences add to our understanding that SDF activism was tied to so many more elements than just a political party.

Another aspect of the SDF's establishment was the extent of cooperation between the SDF and other socialist groupings. The extant historiography would lead one to believe that SDF cooperation was relatively poor, but again the local unveils a more intricate picture. Rochdale was the late nineteenth-century de facto home of modern liberalism and the birthplace of the cooperative movement from 1844 onwards. In this environment, a branch of the SDF would form in 1884. Initially, the branch was located 'in a small house at the bottom of the Parish Church steps, before a move to Blackwater Street, which place, after a stay of four years (1888), they left and went to York place'.[27] A final move to George Street in 1895 would witness a grand opening ceremony attended by over 200 members with a special guest speaker, George Lansbury. The George Street premises had earlier been both a Conservative club and a Liberal club and consisted of two floors:

[25] Ibid., p.256-257.
[26] Katrina Navickas, 'What Happened to Class? New Histories of Labour and Collective Action in Britain', *Social History*, 36:2 May 2011, p.200.
[27] *The Rochdale Times*, 13 April, 1895.

> a hall on the ground floor, the former being fitted up with the latest improvements. On the second floor is a spacious lecture-room, artistically decorated, which will on special occasions be used as a dancing room. The third-storey room, which is very large, but has a low roof, will for the present be used as a lumber room……The club is also fitted up with a lavatory.[28]

This description of the SDF club tells us that within ten years of existence the branch had certainly made good progress. As membership was the only regular source of income, to afford a spacious club premises tells us that the membership must have been significant. The Rochdale branch would encounter many difficulties similar to their comrades across Lancashire and mirror the key role Liberalism would play in competing for workers' support. However, Rochdale SDF would also cooperate with the Independent Labour Party (ILP) to an extent unrivalled in most other parts of the county. Coney pointed out that both parties had a joint election committee, a shared newspaper the *Rochdale Labour News* and worked together in support of many municipal and parliamentary candidates.[29] The Lancashire context reveals repeatedly that often SDF and ILP activists worked together. A 'labour alliance', though impossible to achieve at an executive level, was present in several Lancashire localities and in contradiction to accepted historiography, proves that the mill town branches were engaged in joint socialist actions and were adaptable.

In contrast to Rochdale, the development of a strong ILP in Nelson shows that disagreement over political strategies would and could lead to discord among socialists too. The 'Nelson Socialist Association' was established in June 1891 in rooms on Margaret Street. This socialist body did not immediately affiliate with the SDF, which suggests that local socialism did not necessarily always equate to a branch of the SDF. In turn, this implies that there were different strands of local socialism and/or that the first socialists were simply unaware of the SDF or unwilling to affiliate. The significance being that from the first tentative moments of branch existence in Lancashire, it was

[28] *The Rochdale Times*, 13 April, 1895.
[29] M. Coney, 'The Labour Movement and The Liberal Party in Rochdale 1900-1906', (unpublished MA, University of Huddersfield, 1988, p. 59-63

not given that the SDF Executive would succeed. Even after SDF affiliation, William Etherington recorded that 'now I am a social democrat and trust the labour leaders, but I am not so foolish as to believe we can reach the political millennium at a bound'.[30] An indication from the outset that evolutionary socialism was anticipated and federalism would be jealously guarded. The first three Nelson SDF members were, William Etherington, Walter Birtles and Walter Parrett, all three were self-employed building contractors. Eventually, the three men sought recognition from the SDF and H.M. Hyndman visited the newly formed branch in February 1892 congratulating the group that they were 'hard-headed men of Lancashire'. In December 1893, Keir Hardie arrived in town and a branch of the ILP was formed, this time by a group of weavers. From the inception of socialist ideology in Nelson, the SDF would be competing with another political party and importantly, one based within the dominant labour force, the weavers. The linkage of a specific industry to the ILP would occur in other unions too. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers supported four ILP candidates in July 1895. George Barnes at Rochdale, Tom Man in the Colne Valley, Fred Hammill at Newcastle and A. Shaw in South Leeds.[31] These early trade union inroads would play a considerable part in affecting the later development of politics. Whereas the Nelson SDF were not reflective of the majority of Nelson's workers the Nelson ILP were. However as Leonard Smith noted cautiously, 'membership of different socialist groups in the 1880s and 1890s cannot be taken as evidence of hard-line political stances' and one must acknowledge that cross-over and cooperation between both socialist groupings was not infrequent.[32]

Another point to associate with the establishment of branches, is that SDF activists have often been portrayed as dogmatic and uncompromising. In reality, they were often flexible and very similar to their socialist comrades in other groups. Membership numbers of both the SDF and the ILP in Nelson were similar and compared to other Lancashire branches quite large. The SDF had approximately 84 members in 1894 and

[30] Paul Firth, 'Socialism and the origins of the Labour Party in Nelson 1890-1906', (unpublished MA, University of Manchester, 1975), Nelson Library, Local History Collection, Ref P16, p.15.
[31] David Howell, *Independent Labour Party*, p. 88
[32] Leonard Smith, *Religion and The Rise of Labour* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1993), p. 25

the ILP had approximately 72 members in 1902.[33] The ILP members in Nelson were mainly skilled weavers, whereas the SDF members were self-employed builders, managers of local cooperative stores or female university graduates such as B. Stacey.[34] The attraction to either party being located in their source of origin, the ILP in a trade union and the SDF in a political club. In an area dominated by weavers, Nelson provided the ILP with a considerable advantage over a party more disparate in members with a revolutionary programme. However, this did not prevent Nelson SDF members from being actively involved in trade union agitation from the beginning. In 1891, an industrial dispute arose at Messrs Evans and Berry weaving mill over the system of driving and the SDF became engaged. The strike was a failure but the SDF went on to indict the Nelson Employers Federation for the oppression of labour.[35] By November 1892, the SDF were running candidates in their very first municipal election in Bradley ward, and though defeated 315 votes to 163 (though significantly 303 registered voters did not participate) the socialist John Smith gave a simple address in defeat. 'The reason why I am a socialist is that I consider you brothers and sisters, and you ought to have a chance in the world. Under the present system I don't think you have'.[36] Many SDF activists in mill towns were not so very different from their other socialist colleagues. The political fight between the SDF and the ILP in Nelson was periodic and the understanding of why the ILP eventually succeeded where the SDF did not can only be fully understood from a local perspective. Early formative information tells us much that national histories overlook.

Though this study will emphasise that an executive lead and direction were rare within the SDF, when the mill town branches were established there was some form of executive support. SDF agent A. G. Wolfe (real name Joe Terret) was one such organiser and he is referred to on numerous occasions in Burnley and Nelson in the early 1890s. In August 1892, Wolfe gave addresses at the Burnley Lane recreation ground and on the Market ground. In early 1893, Wolfe was back again at the

[33] Ibid., p.17.
[34] Ibid., p.19.
[35] Firth, 'Socialism and Origins', p.21.
[36] *Burnley Gazette*, 2 November 1892.

Assembly Rooms on Hammerton Street in Burnley.[37] Without Wolfe, the SDF may well not have had branches to organize. Crick noted of Wolfe that 'he was a tireless organiser… effectively campaigned'.[38] A. G. Wolfe visited Nelson in January 1893. The collaboration between the SDF and ILP became a reality and in May 1893, both groupings were contributing towards the *Socialist Journal*, a four page monthly with a circulation of some 4,000.[39] By September 1894, relations were such that SDF member Ernest Johnson was able to propose, though unsuccessfully, a combination of both parties.[40]

Central to and indicative of the mill town branches' development, were the local differences that occurred between the branches. Small variances, often nuanced and minimal, or dependent upon an individual personality or an industrial confrontation, affected political outcomes. Trades councils were the primary political arenas that the mill town SDF branches would try to infiltrate. A trades council in Nelson was established in January 1890. It consisted of twenty-four delegates representing twenty-six cotton trades specialists and it would be through the trades council that William Ward and Lawrence Tattersall, the first weavers' delegates, were elected to the town council in November 1890.[41] Each council was parochial and each became preoccupied with its own specific labour issues and political dynamic. In Nelson, cooperation between the trades council and the two socialist groupings, the SDF and ILP, was so good prior to 1900 that the trades council could rely entirely on ILP and SDF support to bring out the workers to vote for their labour candidates in the municipal elections. In contrast, tensions between members of the trade council and the SDF four miles up the road in Burnley were more apparent. In 1895, the Burnley SDF had made sufficient inroads and progress to convince the Friendly Society of Iron Founders to withdraw from the trades council 'with reservation about the socialist orientation of the Council'.[42] These differences tell us that not only would SDF branches act often like

[37] *Burnley Gazette*, 23 March 1893.
[38] Crick, *The History of the SDF*, p. 110-111
[39] Firth, 'Socialism and Origins', p.41.
[40] Ibid., p.17.
[41] Ibid., p.10.
[42] Ibid., p.6.

autonomous units, but that the mill towns themselves had similar independent and self-governing characteristics. Towns were unique in their specific political party persuasions, weaving trade focus and industrial progress but closely linked together in their social cultures and values.

Similarly, Lawrence Rippon and a number of other weavers enacted their independence in Burnley in 1896. Under the secretarial oversight of SDF man Peter Sharrat, they formed the Textile Operatives Association (TOA) and left the Burnley Weavers Association. The objectives of the TOA were set out in the *Burnley Socialist* in July 1902 and included 'the socialization of the means of production, political support to be used for an independent socialist party and to protect members from unjust treatment from those by whom they are employed'.[43] Beginning with 60 men and 20 women,[44] by October 1903 the TOA could claim 300 members and strength to pay benefits from 4 shillings to 16 shillings per week.[45] At its peak in 1910, the TOA would claim 515 members.[46] Essentially, the TOA operated a policy of coexistence and 'it is likely that they cooperated fully in strikes and other workplace actions that the BWA initiated'.[47] This SDF union reflects the resolute anti-socialist stance of a Lib-Lab tradition. No other town in Lancashire witnessed a parallel confrontation with a cotton union leadership and this re-emphasises the strength and appeal of the SDF in Burnley. J. White goes so far as to assert that 'it is just as plausible to argue that the anti-socialism of the Burnley officials was unusually strong and that they would have also resisted the ILP had it and not the SDF been the dominant socialist group in town'.[48] In addition, the decision to rid the BWA of Rippon and Sharrat gives an indication of the anxiety of the BWA and likewise the possible strength of the socialists. Deviating from SDF stereotyping, the SDF members of the TOA, by forming a union and continuing it for seventeen years, shows a flexibility and resourcefulness often not attributed to SDF members in the past. The TOA survived until 1913 and during its existence the political

[43] *Burnley Socialist*, July 1902.
[44] Joseph White, *The Limits of Trade Union Militancy* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1978), p.158.
[45] *Textile Mercury*, 3 October, 1903.
[46] White, *The Limits*, p.158.
[47] Ibid., p.159.
[48] Ibid., p.160.

union claimed it had recruited between 1,000-3,000 members.[49] The location of Burnley as the SDF stronghold in Lancashire is interconnected with the development of the TOA and appears to owe its legacy to industrial strife and even more to dynamic SDF activists. These factors go some way to explaining why Burnley was a SDF stronghold but perhaps more importantly why the local narrative is essential if we are to understand what the party actually did in the mill towns and comprehend that national historiography is incomplete.

A Mill Town Environment

Jeffrey Hill pinpointed two key facets of SDF understanding. First, the lack of importance of political theory for local SDF activists: 'theory did not play as large a part in the thinking of local militants'.[50] Second, that to understand the success and failure of the SDF one had to understand the cultural life of British workers, which 'holds the key to understanding their developing relationships with other groups'.[51] This study supports Hill's first proposition and attempts to expand upon the second. Having located nearly two dozen SDF activists in this study, it is most informative that none made a single reference to Marxism. Typical members were George Penlington and Tom Hacking of Rochdale. Interviewed in the *Rochdale Labour News* in 1898, Penlington revealed that he read *Reynolds News*, had been a Wesleyan Methodist and wanted the poor 'to be surrounded by more healthy conditions'. Tom Hacking had started work in the mills as a doffer at the age of ten and became a socialist after he had read Lawrence Gronlund's 'Cooperative Commonwealth'. Hacking was motivated by the 'helpless condition of the unemployed during the period of bad trade'.[52] Like so many other mill town SDF activists, these members had humble origins, were autodidacts and focused on practicalities rather than theory. Marxist dogma, as

[49] *Burnley News*, 11 December 1911.
[50] Jeffrey Hill, 'Social Democracy and the Labour Movement. The SDF in Lancashire', *North West Labour History Society*, Vol. 8, 1982, p. 53
[51] Jeffrey Hill, 'Requiem for a Party? Writing the History of Social Democracy', *Labour History Review*, 61:1, Spring 1996, p. 108
[52] *Rochdale Labour News*, November 1898

previously asserted, had little impact on SDF members in the mill towns of Lancashire. This informs that extant historiography, which talked of 'alien creed' and asserted that political theory alienated the party, is incorrect and that very often SDF members were very similar to their other socialist colleagues.

The limited importance of theory is also reflected in the minutes of the Bolton SDF. Whereas national histories often focus on issues of theory, the Bolton minutes reveal a day-to-day existence of its members and their concerns with organizing, social engagements, cleaning, and more divisive issues such as drink and resignations. A more notable feature of the Bolton SDF was its selective process of recruitment. Shufflebotham more than once requested that no new members 'be admitted until they had purchased a copy of the [club] rules and objects'.[53] This selective membership process, if repeated in other branches, would go some way to explaining the small size of the party overall. Interaction with other SDF clubs was regular and correspondence reveals the Bolton SDF branch sending five shillings to Nelson SDF on 6 July 1897 to support their cause of free speech. On two separate other occasions, tickets were 'sent back for the Burnley Draw', and the 'engagement from Burnley of Dr and Ms Aveling be not entertained'.[54] The average attendance at the Bolton SDF meetings varied and though 48 paying members were recorded in January 1897, far fewer voted, with between only twelve and 24 voting in 1896.[55] Political discussion around socialist theory is limited and raised only in relation to branch support for socialist fusion. In April 1896, the branch recorded a motion put forward that it was 'advisable in the interest of the cause to form one united socialist party. Motion carried and that the Secretary send the same to *Justice* and *Clarion*'.[56] A year later, 'that we vote for fusion with the ILP irrespective of name. Motion carried… that communication with ILP to discuss appointment of candidates for school board elections'.[57] The result of this

[53] Bolton SDF Minutes, Bolton History Archive, Ref FDS 1/1, 1 September, 1896
[54] Ibid., 2 Nov 1897.
[55] Ibid., 5 January 1897
[56] Ibid., 14 April, 1896.
[57] Ibid., 1 Sept, 1897.

cooperation being that both parties (SDF and ILP) agreed to split the forthcoming election costs in half.

The Bolton minutes are clearly provincial in nature. Correspondence is primarily between other nearby branches and once again the context of Lancashire appears most influential as practical and administrative topics dominate the agendas. Ironically, like the very workers they wished to represent, opening or closing the bar appeared as the topic that raised most emotion. Though these minutes only represent socialists in Bolton, over a limited period of time, they show the strength of cooperation and support for the larger question of national fusion was strong in Bolton. Another example of local SDF members working in direct contradiction to that of the SDF executive reinforces the argument that the mill town branches, though small, were strongly independent and that to interpret the SDF as a single political unit overlooks the integral nature of what the party actually was.

Hill's second point about understanding workers' culture is crucial to realizing the SDF's trajectory in Lancashire. A set of traditional values and mores existed that were particular to the mill towns and impacted on people in their everyday lives. Importantly, these general values contained caveats and could differ from town to town pending local circumstances. From the intricate system of overseers being responsible for mill loom places and promotion and therefore monetary income, mill towns possessed their own unique identity. Housewives donkey stoned the front step to reflect their maintenance of a good and clean household. Wakes holidays took place at set times of the year when all the mills closed and weavers were allowed a brief respite from the daily toil. The power and room system, especially prevalent in north east Lancashire, provided workers with entrepreneurial opportunities to hire loom space inside factories. In a number of districts, different forms of co-partnership undertakings also took place. In the Burnley district of Harle Syke a nominally co-

operative venture survived beyond 1900.[58] Lancastrians were also distinguished for their stoicism and their culture of thrift. Stoicism was reflected in contemporary literature. Allen Clarke's *Lancashire Lasses and Lads* told of the death of half-timer Florrie Heyes, to which the community responded 'and death had marked most of them for the early taking; but nobody thought anything about it; it had always been so, and always would be so'.[59] Lancastrian frugality was evinced and encouraged through the many local cooperative societies, friendly societies and 'going away clubs'. The act of saving reflected the existence of extra income and throws light on working-class values and beliefs. Essentially a vehicle for individual rather than collective advance, Trevor Griffiths argues that this parsimony conveys how the working class accepted 'the conventions of capitalist organisation' and 'served to expose important economic and cultural divisions which lay at the heart of the working-class experience'.[60] The significance being that a picture of mill town culture begins to emerge which is distinctive and contains elements of affinity that 'for most workers, was a means of individual rather than collective advance'.[61] If not an antithetical disposition to a philosophy of communal socialism, it is one which raises questions as to how fertile the mill towns might be for the SDF.

The existence of a proud Lancashire dialect enhanced this cultural distinctiveness further. Lancashire dialect was given expression by Ben Brierley's 'Ab-o'th-yate' [Abe of the Gate] and carried powerful social expression 'foreground [ing] the superiority of Lancashire customs'.[62] Lancashire mill towns had a distinct set of formal and informal guidelines of how one should live. An integral part of this culture was the rich sporting background of the county. P. Swain outlined the continuity of a sporting culture in the Lancashire triangle between Darwen, Bolton and Blackburn, and summarised that this sporting heritage encouraged betting drinking and professional football, all self-fulfilling activities that would not help convert workers to a socialist revolution but

[58] Trevor Griffiths, *The Lancashire Working Classes 1880-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), p. 187
[59] Ibid., p. 117
[60] Ibid., p. 220
[61] Ibid., p. 326
[62] Taryn Hakala, 'A Great Man in Clogs: Performing Authenticity in Victorian Lancashire', *Victorian Studies,* 52:3, Spring 2010, p 401

would rather contribute to a mill town lifestyle that valued immediacy before political salvation.[63] Simply put, mill workers were invariably religious, hardworking 'folk', who placed a great emphasis on respectable behaviour and the daily immediacy of earning enough money. It was not surprising then that journalist Angus Reach would note of his tour of Lancashire that 'these towns wear a monotonous sameness of aspect, physical and moral. In fact, the social condition of the different town populations is almost as much alike as the material appearance of the tall chimneys under which they live … but in all essential respects, a description of one is a description of all'.[64]

These mill town environments provided meaning and sometimes erected barriers to the propagation of a socialist counter-culture. As early as the 1870s there was a 'Weavers Catechism', which included ten weavers' commandments: 'Thou shalt tremble and fear when thus sees the manager. Thou shalt not join the weavers union. Thou shalt not grumble. Thou shalt not complain at being sacked'.[65] These sardonic directives reveal not so much a class-consciousness but a factory consciousness and a sense of 'them' and 'us'. Simultaneously, many Lancastrians called the cyclical nature of poverty as 'going through the small sieve'. A contemporary journalist outlined the life cycle of a weaver:

> The operative blessed with a numerous progeny will…often find his impoverishment steadily going on, despite his utmost efforts, for the first fifteen years of his married life. Then the tide of his fortunes begins to turn; his children get successively into work and, for the next dozen years, there may be some chance of pecuniary accumulation. Finally, as his sons and daughters marry off…the operative if still alive lapses into penury – perhaps, if his children prove ingrate, he falls to the parochial officers and so ends his story.[66]

[63] P. Swain, 'Cultural Continuity and Football in Nineteenth Century Lancashire', *Sport in History*, 28:4, 2008, pp. 566-582
[64] *Morning Chronicle*, Angus Reach, 1849
[65] Geoffrey Trodd, 'Political Changes', p.287. Said to have been published in the *Burnley Diary*, 1 October, 1869.
[66] *Fortnightly Review*, W. Abram, 1868, p.431.

It is no surprise, therefore, to find that deferred gratification, as espoused by SDF reformers, meant little in a work environment where things were likely to get worse, not better, as one grew older. The best many workers could achieve was 'precarious incomes saved in small collective self-help schemes known colloquially as 'diddums or totines', so called because the person running it might 'diddle off'.[67] These values of mill town culture, a factory consciousness and a precarious lifestyle, would not mesh well with SDF long-term salvation. The mill town environment had its own in-built hurdles to SDF success that national histories have yet to recognise.

A key political and social issue of the mill towns was the issue of 'half-timers', the employment of children in factories and mills. Many socialists and philanthropists, including the SDF, saw an increased value in education and abhorred the terrible conditions and long working hours that prevailed for many children in mills. In contrast, many weavers eked out an existence on little money, but with several children, all eligible for work from ten years onwards, a family could increase their income significantly. In 1891, twenty per cent of the workforce (which totalled 200,000) in the weaving mills in north east Lancashire were children under the age of fifteen.[68] In Burnley and the surrounding districts a female power loom weaver could add to her 24s 11d 'the traditional half-crown a week for beginners, up to 14s for little piecers.'[69] To make the dilemma more acute for the SDF, the trade councils of many mill towns were dominated by weavers' who continuously opposed any rise in the employment age of youngsters. Burnley Trades Council noted in April 1891 that 'it is undesirable to raise the ages at which the children shall in future be allowed to commence work. It would be a considerable hardship to…families without being of real benefit to the children'.[70] Alan Fowler has argued that poverty and culture were the two main reasons why weavers were reluctant to abandon child labour: 'it was a

[67] Mark Clapson, *A Bit of a Flutter* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p.63.
[68] Paul Firth, 'Trade Councils in North east Lancashire 1890-1900', (unpublished papers located at Nelson Library, Local History Collection, p.14.
[69] Ibid., p.32.
[70] Ibid., p.14.

foregone conclusion that you went in the mill in those days'.[71] For the weavers it seemed self-evident. Lancashire people themselves fought bitterly against any attempts to abolish it. 'I didn't go to school half time, but my father was convinced until his dying day that he had given me a good education by allowing me to stay at school until I was thirteen'.[72] Child labour was a key factor amongst weavers because it was an accepted historical tradition in Lancashire and the SDF was fighting against this very tradition. Almost inevitably, when the Burnley SDF branch led by Irving, proposed to alter this system by raising children's entrance age into work, it was interpreted by the majority of weavers as an attack on their incomes and welfare. It would not supply the SDF with any extra voters. Weavers' ballots on the half-time issue saw a stubborn resistance. Such was the opposition in Burnley alone that the weavers simply refused to vote on the issue in 1911.[73] The last pre-war ballot saw 116,573 weavers vote for a retention of the half-time system and only 29,933 in favour of raising the age to thirteen.[74]

Two more everyday grievances, opposed to wider political issues, captured weavers' attention and illustrate how support for SDF branches could be undermined by mill town culture. The first issue was a desire for better wages and, the second issue was operatives' anger against violent or unreasonable overlookers, lower shop floor managers who were responsible for productivity results and who were often accused of 'sweating' or 'driving' mill workers. Despite a uniform wages list being agreed in 1892, known as the Chorley List, employers continued to implement their own individual mill lists. The Nelson Power Loom Weavers Association went on strike in November 1892 over this very issue but after five long months returned to work defeated.[75] The minutes of the Burnley Power Loom Weavers are filled with such complaints. One note recorded that 'a circular be drawn up and sent to all employers in the Burnley and District…asking them to prohibit tacklers from employing and

[71] Alan Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton Operatives and Work, 1900-1950* (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2003), p.56.
[72] D. Rubenstein, 'An Interview with Tom Stephenson', *North West Labour History Journal*, 25, 1971.
[73] *Burnley Gazette*, 29 December 1911.
[74] Joseph L. White, *The Limits of Trade Union Militancy* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1978), p.61.
[75]Firth, 'Trade Councils', p.12.

discharging their own weavers...and to pay tacklers by weekly and not by the piece'.[76] The Power Loom Weavers minutes noted several cases of industrial dispute involving women that were to 'be entertained into court'.[77] These weavers' minutes leave a compelling impression that the vast majority of weavers and their union agents were involved on a daily basis in one task or another that was strictly mill related and it reinforces the belief that first-hand mill concerns appealed far more than 'faraway' socialist politics to mill town weavers.

To understand how SDF branches made progress in the mill towns we need to comprehend the role that the SDF branches played within the towns. The Amalgamated Weavers Association (AWA) was the predominant trade union in mill town Lancashire that represented the weavers. The result was an assortment of 29 district associations formed in the mill towns, all possessing their own federated representatives. The problems within the weaving mills of Lancashire amounted to a veritable jigsaw of minor disputes. Local district weavers' unions' minutes of the period read like a daily plaster on plaster of complaints, grievances and small-scale strikes. One note recorded how 'the Secretary should go to Crabtree Wood Top Mill and inquire as to the cause of the stoppage and report back to the committee'.[78] Another that 'there be a shop meeting at Cliviger and report to them what has been done and if he (the owner) will not pay the list to take steps to stop the firm'.[79] Another note tells how 'a deputation consisting of the President, Vice President and Secretary J. Markham, E. Birtwistle and J. Tempest, wait upon Overlookers in reference to 'Driving' in the mills.[80] Several years on and the grievances were no less different or infrequent; 130 weavers went on strike at Jubilee Mill in Padiham in 1898 on account of too hard 'driving'.[81] That the union representatives, Markham and Tempest, were SDF men, illustrates how from an early stage in the development of labour activism some mill

[76] East Lancashire Amalgamated, Power Loom Weavers Minutes, Lancashire Archive, Preston, Ref, DDX 1274/14 November, 1891.
[77] Ibid., 5 February 1891.
[78] East Lancashire Amalgamated, Power Loom Weavers Minutes, Ref, DDX 1274/1/10/, 28 January, 1891.
[79] Ibid., 3 February, 1891.
[80] Ibid., 13 April, 1893.
[81] Firth, Trade Councils, Ref, P169/SDF/3, p.14.

towns had SDF members who were part of the official process of representing the major skilled workforce. This is a vital factor on a number of levels. It tells us that SDF activists were part of the major workers' representational organisation and it helps, in part, to explain SDF appeal and longevity. The constant workplace irritations also suggest an industry full of political friction and one that contained a dissatisfied workforce who could be willing to listen to socialists who would advocate change. SDF positions of influence within the weavers unions in Nelson and Burnley goes some way to undermining national stereotyping of SDF non-union involvement and explaining local success.

More SDF trade union influence could be located in Burnley. In industry, a particularly intransigent mining company led to a very distinctive relationship between the SDF and the miners. Tensions were never far from the surface and the Exors of Hargreaves mining company was anti-union and confrontational. The Exors 'declined to entertain the question of an advance of wages so long as the request comes through the delegates of the union'.[82] When miners at one of the Hargreaves's pits refused to work with a 'knobstick' (strike-breaker) a strike was called in November 1892. The miners noted that 'the Exors kept one pit-set of men on strike for a few weeks, and their average was only 4s 8.5d per day….and as for the Press, they don't forget to thump us when opportunity affords'.[83] The miners' correspondence was signed by SDF man, and miners' leader, John Sparling. Burnley was becoming a byword for industrial problems in the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners Federation (LCMF). An issue complicated by the fact that Sparling was 'almost as frequently in conflict with the LCMF officials as with their own employers'.[84] This unending flow of a three-party triangle of disagreement, between the mine owners, the official LCMF agents and Sparling became a characteristic of coal mining relations in Burnley. Conspicuously, it would be the local miners' leaders, John Leeming and John Sparling and not the LCMF officials, who were to politicize the miners in two very different ways.

[82] Trodd, 'Political Change', p.324.
[83] *Burnley Gazette*, 26 November 1892.
[84] Jeffrey Hill, 'Lib-Labism, Socialism and Labour in Burnley 1890-1918', *Northern History*, 35:1, 2013, p.188.

This Lancashire context adds to our appreciation that SDF activity was parochially more complex than national interpretations and that unique local town circumstances often affected SDF fortunes. The extent of SDF trade union involvement in the miners' union in Burnley is a position broad histories overlook. The miners' dispute of 1900-1901, 'perhaps the bitterest dispute of the early part of the decade, and certainly one of the costliest',[85] provides an example of the combativeness of the coal owners and the role of SDF man Sparling. The enmity towards Sparling was long established, 'relations between local union officials, particularly John Sparling…and the coal owners were never better than at breaking point, the local companies preferring … to have [talks] directly with LCMF officials'.[86] When in the spring of 1900 the local miners activated a concerted effort to unionise six pits of the Exors of Colonel Hargreaves, trouble was inevitable. The next year would witness a divergence of positions between the LCMF officials, Greenall, Woods and Ashton, who were conciliatory, and the SDF representatives of the Burnley miners, Sparling and Wilcox, who were adamant to achieve a closed shop. Early in 1901, the LCMF officials urged the miners at Cheapside pit to return to work. At a large meeting of the miners in mid-February, a resolution was proposed by Greenall to return to work. 'The resolution was unanimously rejected, not a hand being held up in its favour'.[87] In the end, the dispute ended in March 1901 and had cost the LCMF £3,000 and lasted five months. The Exors forced a humiliating settlement on the miners, which included 'a refusal to meet any local officials whilst Sparling continued to be Branch Secretary, [and] future deputations to be left an 'open question''.[88] Effectively, Sparling was removed and the miners had gained nothing. In Burnley, the existence of an employer's non-negotiating style of mine ownership created an industrial environment that the SDF could utilize. The Exors provoked many disputes and gave the district a reputation for conflict. The LCMF had 94 branches and 30,000 members in 1900, but its representatives were rarely socialist. The LCMF, though it affiliated to the LRC in 1903 and elected two parliamentary

[85] Ian Frederick Scott, 'The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Federation 1900-1914', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of York, 1977), p.52.
[86] Ibid., p.52.
[87] *Burnley Express*, 20 February 1901.
[88] Scott, 'The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners', p.54.

candidates at Ince and St Helens in 1906, was never driven towards independent labour politics by socialist ideology.[89] In contrast, miners' militancy was dependent upon local agitators and circumstances.[90] Wherein Burnley SDF through Sparling had a key motivator, Wigan SDF 'had but little impact on the LRC … inclined to go its own way'.[91] Yet again, the individual and the local combine to underline the importance of the Lancashire context.

Two other factors particular to the mill town culture were its proclivity to encourage the SDF branches to be independent, and conversely, to sporadically act together. The first characteristic is best exemplified with the establishment of the *Socialist North East Lancashire Labour News* (often referred to as the *Socialist*). Burnley 'Left' politics now had a 'mouthpiece' in town with an estimated circulation of 2,000.[92] The relevance of the paper lies in three areas. First, in part it reveals how well organized the local branch was. Printing a newspaper required many things including, writers, printers, sellers, finance and above all an audience. Second, the paper played a major role in disseminating SDF views and politics. A quick glance of an edition from 1894 and one can see the paper appealing for funds for Hyndman's Parliamentary fund and support for the miners at Towneley Colliery returning to work after a strike.[93] A third factor the paper reveals is one of the earliest distinct splits between local and national SDF politics.

John R. Widdup, the editor of the *Socialist*, was proud of this local achievement and spoke of how in running the *Socialist* 'we invariably ran counter to all the accepted principles on which newspapers are conducted'.[94] In an article in the *Burnley Express* Widdup went on to expound on these principles.

[89] Howell, *British Workers* p.31.
[90] Scott, 'The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners', p.91.
[91] Ibid., p.128.
[92] Crick, *The History of the SDF*, p.110.
[93] *North East Lancashire and Labour News*, 1 June 1894.
[94] *Burnley Express*, 15 February 1896.

> In the starting of newspapers a certain amount of capital is supposed to be indispensable, which was probably the reason why we made up our minds to start ours without. Then, in naming a paper, it is usual to seek for a name that will attract advertisers and the public; we chose a name that would repel both. Punctuality in publishing was a rule which we honoured more in the breach than in the observance, and instead of making our first issue (as is the custom) an especially strong and good one, it was the poorest and feeblest sheet we ever issued during our whole career.[95]

The significance is the character of Widdup's portrayal. There is a determination to do things differently, to stand apart from regular capitalist practices and be a separate political grouping, an approach most SDF members argued was essential to distance the party from the dangers of Lib-Labism. The paper's board consisted of SDF delegates: seven from Burnley, two from Nelson and one each from Colne, Padiham and Barrowford, a ratio which may have well reflected the size of memberships in the given districts. Widdup related how 'in the summer of 1895 Burnley and the surrounding districts were aflame with red hot socialist enthusiasm…the literary ardour of the Burnley socialists was not to be quenched…why not run a paper of our own we asked ourselves?'[96] Here we have an example of a consciousness and a clear indication of a branch that felt it was successful, unique and outside of national control. Notably, all four of our focussed towns, contained SDF branches that, though cooperative amongst themselves, mirrored this fierce independence. The Lancashire context encouraged independence. Branches were distant from London, led by one or two self-motivated activists, often possessing their own powerful propaganda newspaper. A particular SDF mill town environment was detached from London, proudly Lancastrian and contained self-taught men on a mission.

As the *Socialist* continued to provide a ready forum for the Burnley and district socialists, the SDF National Executive 'was in fact concerned that sales of *Justice* would be affected by the Burnley *Socialist* and raised the matter at the SDF's Annual

[95] *Burnley Express*, 15 February 1896.
[96] *Burnley Express*, 15 February 1896.

Conference 1894'.[97] This conference revealed that the Lancastrians also possessed a similar ideology on the practical implementation of socialism. Quelch spoke on behalf of *Justice* at the conference in London. He concluded 'circulation of 1,000 more per week was required to make the paper pay its way'.[98] Other members joined in the debate and bemoaned branches who were not taking enough quires of *Justice*. Dan Irving responded, the *Socialist* had been created 'because they felt that it would supply a want which *Justice* could not possibly meet…especially in view of the candidature of Hyndman'.[99] He reminded delegates that the Burnley branch had no debts and that a motion expressing disapprovement of *Justice* sales 'would possibly set the backs up of some of the men who had been struggling hard to make the circulation'.[100] The motion was amended and branches were urged to do their best to pay debts and increase sales. Irving had successfully side-stepped an attack on his local paper. Moreover, directly after Irving's speech, Tom Hurley of Blackburn SDF declared that Blackburn too did their best, but 'articles which appeared in *Justice* were sometimes beyond the understanding of young socialists who had just come into the movement'.[101] Hurley also maintained that the *Socialist* was necessary for Hyndman's candidature in Burnley. This reveals that some form of Lancastrian solidarity existed, with Hurley keen to support Irving. The second part of his statement could easily be translated into 'too intellectual for ordinary workers'. Though only a supposition, Hurley was implying that the paper was difficult to understand. This indicates that local SDF branch leaders had already understood that national party language and rhetoric was too elaborate and beyond comprehension for many workers who had left schooling before the age of eleven and therefore not suitable for use in the field. This in turn explains tensions between the national and local, and why branches 'interpreted' directives from the Executive in an attempt to be more successful locally.

[97] Crick, *The History of the SDF*, footnote 27, p. 110.
[98] SDF Annual Conference, 1894, Marxist Memorial Library, Ref, YA04/REP, 00243868, p.20.
[99] Ibid., p.21.
[100] Ibid., p.21.
[101] Ibid., p.22

Ultimately, the *Socialist* was ordered to disband and tensions around the decision were raised in a heated exchange of views between Hyndman and Widdup. The exchange clearly revealed a fractious split between national and local party positions. Hyndman concluded that the demise of the *Socialist* was caused because it was 'too heavy a drain on the resources of the Social Democratic party in the district'.[102] Widdup's reply was a direct rebuff of Hyndman and worth quoting in full:

> H. M Hyndman explains his passive attempts to strangle the *Socialist* by saying that the forces of Social Democracy in the district were unable to bear the drain on their resources which the paper's existence entailed. Probably this is his diplomatic rather than his real reason. At any rate, as the SDF branches in this district are the custodians of their own resources it is difficult to see how such a reason can justify outside meddling. If we are to adopt Hyndman's method of reasoning what shall we say of the 'drain' of over £200 incurred by his own futile candidature? This sum, coupled with a little effort, would have set the *Socialist* on its feet, and made it a paying concern: but it did not square with the plans of some London socialists to make it a paying concern. I only say this to show that Hyndman's 'drain' reason is merely an exposition of his diplomatic art.

Widdup concluded his article with reference to the fact that the *Burnley Express* had called him a 'follower' of Hyndman. 'There are some socialists who are 'followers'…of this or that man, but I trust I am not one of them. I prefer to do my own thinking'.[103] Lancashire SDF men in particular, from Widdup to Thomas J Hacking in Rochdale, to Thomas Hurley in Blackburn, repeatedly exhibited a staunch independence, a trait predominant in the Lancashire arena.

The fight over the *North East Lancashire Labour News (Socialist)* exposed a clear example of local and national tension. The national executive exercised its authority, through national conference and a vote, and on this occasion succeeded in its aims. The consequences for Burnley and for the fortunes of the mill town branches would

[102] *Burnley Express*, 19 February 1896.
[103] *Burnley Express*, 20 February 1896.

not be as drastic as one might first think. The crucial factor in this example was that by 1902 the Burnley branch had once again decided its own political strategy and started yet another local SDF newspaper, the *Pioneer*. The *North East Lancashire Labour News* incident shows us that the national executive of the SDF were capable of exercising some form of national intervention into local branch politics but the appearance of the *Pioneer* suggests that local autonomy was only ever temporarily removed. This federal nature of the party is a key issue as it mirrors the party's administrative strategy, which was in reality a double-edge sword. The branches made decisions on local political issues, which meant national policies were interpreted by the branches – this in itself could lead to a large range of actions, some contradictory, few coordinated and only a handful successful. A lack of national strategy from London enabled a true federation, which with its many disparate parts, was always ideologically open to many understandings. The Lancashire branches would each interpret SDF socialism through their own particular multiple island lenses.

The importance of the Lancashire context was revealed in two more areas. The first was in a form of unified action to re-affiliate to the joint trade union and workers' pressure group the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), the predecessor of the Labour Party. The move towards independent representation gathered pace in the mills. The *Cotton Factory Times* talked of a 'Labour Representation Crusade' and by February of 1903, the cotton unions across Lancashire had voted 84,154 to 19,856 in favour of affiliation to the LRC.[104] The SDF secession from the LRC as early as August 1901 was seen by many, then and now, as 'a mistake for it now cut itself off from the most influential independent political organisation of the working classes'.[105] The Lancashire branches were at the forefront of agitating within the SDF to return the party back to a labour alliance. Blackburn ILP representative, Charles Higham, emphasized the division between local and national politics. At the 1899 ILP conference, Higham stated that 'in the view of many members, the men who were keeping the two bodies apart were the leaders themselves. His branch had excellent

[104] P. F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p.93.
[105] K. Laybourn, 'The Failure of Socialist Unity in Britain 1893-1914', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, Volume 4, 1994, p. 166

working relations with the SDF'.[106] At the annual SDF conference in 1905, John Moore of Rochdale SDF, with the support of the Burnley and Blackburn branches, moved an unsuccessful motion to re-affiliate to the LRC.[107] He noted that 'in every direction I go I find the opinion of the majority of SDF members I come into contact with is in favour of re-joining the LRC'.[108] At a local level, it was possible to blur or ignore choices that had been made nationally. What could be called vigorous municipal socialism was made possible by many small local alliances, placed often before ideological or doctrinaire issues. Though it is hard to locate any other similar ideological cohesion within the party, outside that of the national executive, a pro-fusion position in Lancashire is a dynamic example of the independent nature and decentralized stance of mill town branches of the SDF. This socialist cooperation revealed itself in joint newspaper ventures, such as the *Rochdale Labour News,* and the construction, on several occasions, of Joint Election Committees (JEC) in 1897 and in 1899. Well-run newspapers, the existence of joint committees, and operative inroads into trade unions placed some mill town branches in more advantageous positions to influence workers, hardly characteristics of a group that national histories have considered to be on the 'periphery' of the political Left.

The extensive institutional structure of the mill towns provided the SDF branches with different political pathways and reveals a second important feature of the Lancashire context. The activists formed and developed Local Election Associations (LEA). The LEAs were examples of what SDF members could achieve through cooperation and adaptability and are an example of a party that was neither isolated nor estranged. By May 1898, the party was far-sighted enough to organize a conference of Socialist School Board Members. The conference delegates markedly gathered not at a SDF branch but at the ILP club at 53 Booth Street in South Manchester. Dan Irving of the Burnley SDF convened the meeting and Peter Lee of Rochdale SDF presided. Eighteen

[106] Ibid., p.167
[107] Jeffrey Hill, 'The Social Democratic Federation in Lancashire', *Bulletin of the North West Labour History Society*, Vol 8, 1982, p.52.
[108] *Justice*, 11 March, 1905.

school boards were represented, 'from Bristol in the south to Leeds in the north'.[109] The importance of these local Lancastrian agencies was not necessarily their direct result, but the participatory action itself. By gathering to discuss socialist issues in relation to tangible everyday life topics, the Socialist School Board were highlighting alternatives and testing responses. More organisations were developed or utilized by the Lancashire SDF branches. In Nelson SDF, members used other agencies to defend the workers. Ernest Johnson and John Pickover worked as Chairperson and Secretary for the Nelson Ratepayers Association from 1889 to 1893. In this capacity, they argued concertedly for municipal land ownership and land rates of not more than two shillings a week. The fight culminated in opposition to the Corporation grant for the Prince of Wales's visit in 1902 and a SDF protest petition of twenty-four names was presented to the council. By October, Nelson SDF accused the town council of wasting ratepayers' money on entertainment for councillors. The subsequent dismissal of the Borough Treasurer vindicated the SDF's actions all along.[110] SDF members were contributing to a local climate of participatory socialist action partly because they were intrepid but also because they were already engaged in the extant structural pathways. Cooperation with the ILP, positions of official administration within weavers' unions and the cooperative movement and support from the *Clarion* revealed a very particular Lancashire context that assisted in this early growth. The nature of the Lancastrian struggle revealed that activists were far from the negative stereotype of general histories. They were creative and active in various bodies often focused on local activities instead of ideologies and at times locally successful.

The mill town environment valued immediacy before long-term planning. It was a culture that often embraced sport and drink. 'Spinners' trade unions feared that if workers started work after beer houses were open, they would be tempted not to go into work'.[111] A mill town way of life existed that often contained contradictory social features. Weavers had a right to drink and visit the working men's club but simultaneously would uphold high standards of respectability and cleanliness. Friday

[109] *Rochdale Labour News*, May 1898.
[110] Firth, 'Socialism and the Origins', Nelson Library, ref, P16, p. 29.
[111] Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton*, p. 69

night would be 'Mary Ann night' when all the family contributed to house cleaning.[112] Pointedly, mill town cultures were complicated and contrary. The mill towns possessed a large proportion of wage-earning women that challenged the male gendered 'family wage' doctrine and encouraged women workers' initiatives that questioned traditional women's roles. In Bolton alone, campaigners such as Alice Collinge and Sarah Reddish would be active in the Women's Textile Society and the Women Mill Workers Self-help Committee.[113] Yet leading activists like Enid Stacy could still complain that 'in many towns unfortunately women are very quiescent, attend meetings in small numbers, and are extremely apathetic'.[114] Most significantly, mill towns, for large periods, would enjoy periods of employment that increased disposable income. In July 1902, the *Burnley Express* revealed a list of 'thrift clubs' dispersals to workers: Ebenezer PSA £700, Mount Pleasant PSA £80, Peel Manufacturing Co, Springfield £120, Messrs J. Grey Ltd £600 and the Cooperative Society of Burnley have disbursed several thousands of pounds to their members in the shape of the divi'.[115] That same summer, workers' holiday excursions were 'more noticeable than ever in the past' and that 'places available for visitation … are much more numerous'.[116] Mill town workers, though sometimes affected by periodic trade slumps, had a stake in their mill community that provided a palpable reward. These workers would no doubt welcome SDF trade union men who fought for their industrial conditions. In contrast, they would not welcome a SDF activist that threatened to take away any extra income. Not for the first time, the local would reveal that support or not for the SDF would be built on a combination of paradoxes and personalities determined by particular local contexts.

Liberalism, Paternalism and Labour

[112] Harold Benenson, 'The Family Wage and Working Women's Consciousness in Britain, 1880-1914', *Politics and Society*, 19:1, 1991, p. 93
[113] Steven King, *Women, Welfare and Local Politics 1880-1920* (Sussex: Academic Press, 2006), pp. 78 and 147
[114] *Justice,* 18 August 1894
[115] *Burnley Express*, 9 July 1902
[116] *Burnley Express,* 9 July 1902

The strength of opposition to the SDF across Lancashire was large and extensive. A closer local examination of three of these main hurdles, Liberalism, paternalism and the Labour Party, provides greater insight and local intricacy, which strengthens the understanding that SDF politics was very much more than a one-dimensional political conflict. Across Lancashire, the SDF would be confronted with a Liberal Party determined to remain 'progressive' and keen to implement social reform. Of the 66 parliamentary seats in the North West contested in the general elections, the Liberal Party won 53 in 1906 and 45 in January 1910.[117] Furthermore, the Lib-Lab pact was pronounced in Lancashire. This political arrangement, in one degree or another, affected the towns in this case study. As early as 1892, Liberal MP, T. Snape informed a crowd of well-wishers at Heywood that the Liberal Party 'had a sincere desire to advance the cause of Labour', and that Keir Hardie had influence because of 'the services (the vote) which the Liberal Party had rendered to labour'.[118] A little later during the 1900 and 1906 general elections, Liberal candidate, Gordon Harvey, a local mill owner in Littleborough, ploughed a familiar furrow, emphasizing his 'radicalism'. 'There is no doubt that the emergence of the socialist movement had brought about this transformation of attitude and Harvey was intent on stealing the socialists' thunder'.[119] This Liberal tactic no doubt created a specific socialist antipathy towards Liberalism that was a key facet of mill town socialism and one that at times would bring the local SDF and ILP branches closer together, Hill noting that 'the unifying factor among an otherwise disparate collection of labour spokesmen was their common enmity towards official Liberalism'.[120]

This Liberal context of the Lancashire mill towns affected politics in a particular way. A well-established bank of Lib-Lab trade union politicians were at the Liberal Party's disposal and would agitate on its behalf. In Rochdale, Charles Redfern of the Operative Spinners, James Cryer of the Power Looms Weavers and James Kingsley of the Card

[117] Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, pp. 424, 425
[118] *Rochdale Observer*, 16 November, 1892.
[119] Coney, 'The Labour Movement and the Liberal Party', p.74.
[120] Hill, 'Social Democracy and the Labour Movement', p. 47

Operatives were all 'under the political umbrella of Liberalism'.[121] These trade unionists saw labour representation in Liberal terms. Wardleworth South ward in the 1898 and 1900 by-elections saw trade council and Liberal candidates only. The *Rochdale Labour News* pointed out that 'we have scores of these Liberal-Labour representatives on our public bodies… and they cannot be distinguished from the unadulterated Capitalist Liberals, by any action they take either in council or Parliament'.[122]. To make political conversion even more difficult, the SDF would discover that many workers were ardent Liberal supporters. The Burnley Liberal Association had many worker members: 'of the 400 composing the executive, at least 300 are working men'.[123] In Burnley, this opposition was entrenched in the Burnley Weavers Association and in its President, David Holmes. Holmes personified working-class Liberalism and 'was a major force in keeping his union behind the Liberals and away from independent politics'.[124] Activists, like John Leeming in Burnley, worked to improve weavers' conditions but allied themselves to the Liberal Party. As Jeffrey Hill has noted, 'it was the refusal of the BWA to participate in such an alliance [with the socialists] that accounted for the absence of a Labour candidate in the 1906 general election'.[125] Mill town trade union traditions encouraged workers to perceive Liberalism as the natural inheritor of radical reform, which determined that electoral representation would often not be SDF socialism in Lancashire. 'Leadership of the cotton unions remained in the hands of the older trade unionists till the eve of the war, losing faith in their Liberalism but seeing in socialism 'wild hare-brained schemes' that were 'highly objectionable to a large section of workers'.[126] Importantly, one form of workers' politics already existed in the mill towns before the SDF and established trade union organisations, participating and supporting workers in their everyday working lives, readily influenced workers' political support.

[121] Coney, 'The Labour Movement and the Liberal Party', p.18.
[122] *Rochdale Labour News*, March 1900.
[123] *Burnley Radical*, 8 January, 1887.
[124] Trodd, 'Political Change and the Working Class', p. 316
[125] Jeffrey Hill, 'Lib-Labism, Socialism and Labour in Burnley, 1890-1918', *Northern History*, 35:1 November 2013, p.200.
[126] *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph*, 28 March 1903, Secretary Blackburn Weavers, Joseph Cross.

The competition for weavers' votes between the Liberals and the socialists created a vigorous hostility. Fred Maddison, a progressive Lib/Lab MP in Burnley from 1906, had lost the January 1910 general election by 95 votes. Maddison and the Liberals regularly appropriated socialist programmes of welfare and this caused much rivalry and anger. Maddison was forced to flee from the platform at meetings in Stretford and Wandsworth and the normally moderate *Labour Leader* called him 'an open enemy of Labour independence'.[127] Dan Irving, never one to hold back, declared him 'only fit to be tied in a sack and thrown in the canal'.[128] One month after Maddison's January defeat, he withdrew as the Liberal candidate for Burnley. The *Lancashire Daily Post* printed Maddison's letter of resignation in full. He acknowledged that his position to increase the school leaving age may have been responsible for his defeat but it was the socialists who bore the brunt of his wrath. 'Burnley is the cockpit of the most violent socialism in the United kingdom. It has exhausted its malice and misrepresentations on myself'.[129] Maddison's pride was no doubt bruised, but his statement recognized the long-running vitriol towards the SDF and the impact of the half-time issue on voting.

Trade councils were often the major forum where mill town politics took place. A look at the years 1890 to 1894 in one mill town unveils a pattern of trade council politics between the Liberal Party, the trade council and the SDF, and shows how local political circumstances were so different from the national. Rochdale SDF ran three candidates in the November 1890 municipal elections based on a programme that included the demand for an eight-hour day, the introduction of union rates/wages for employees, and the alteration of Town Council meetings to 7.00pm instead of 10.00am, so as to enable workers' attendance. This was not an avowedly Marxist programme, but one more shaped by local circumstances. Thus, another 'SDF island' had its own interpretation of socialism. These years saw a melee of local political intrigue. The SDF approached the trades council asking them to form a 'Labour Board' but received no qualified response. Then, in May, the trades council informed the Liberal Reform Association of their intention to put forward two candidates of their own. The Liberals

[127] *Labour Leader*, 21 January 1910.
[128] *Burnley Gazette*, 4 May 1904.
[129] *Lancashire Daily Post*, 26 February, 1910.

were slow to respond. The trade council was not prepared to wait. That November the municipal elections returned 32 Liberal and 8 Conservative candidates. Thomas Whittaker, the SDF candidate in Wardleworth East ward, received 158 votes to the Liberal 522 votes.[130] At the end of 1894, a by-election in Wardleworth South saw the Liberals support the President of the Weavers Union, James Cryer, in direct competition to a socialist candidate Peter Lee. Cryer won with 701 votes to Lee's 147. The Liberal Party was manipulating the trade union leadership, wherever possible, to secure political power. In addition, the radical or progressive voter of Rochdale now had four viable alternatives: the SDF, the ILP, the established trade council representative and the Liberal Party, all of whom would claim 'progressive' programmes of social welfare. Rochdale SDF would place local trade council negotiation, alliances and manoeuvrings before any ideology and appear much closer to reformist socialism than any doctrinaire Marxism.

Other features of mill town environments also assisted the established parties. The peculiar concept of 'fit and proper persons' existed whereupon both the Liberals and the Conservatives could and would transcend party politics, by transferring to the electorate the idea that only a responsible candidate could be elected. The *Rochdale Observer* praised one respectable Liberal/Conservative agreement in 1880: 'seeing that Mr Councillor Johnson is the retiring Conservative member in Castleton North, it is gratifying that no contest has ensued in that township'.[131] The societal idea that a type of 'respectable candidate' existed would most certainly work against the SDF. For many mill town workers, 'respectable' was embedded in hard work, fair play and Godliness. Suffragette Annie Kenney romantically described Lancastrians as 'a hardy people…they rise early and retire late. Hard work, hard thinking, homely comforts and a firm belief in the Church and Sunday School, these have been the backbone of this strong, proud, homely people'.[132] SDF activists, often portrayed as revolutionaries, atheists and free-lovers, would fall a long way short of 'Lancastrian respectable'. As in

[130] T. Heywood, *The New Annals of Rochdale* (Rochdale: J. Clegg Publisher, 1899), p.143.
[131] Robert W. Garner, '*Municipal Liberalism in Rochdale 1880-1914*', (unpublished BA, University of Salford, 1983), p.33.
[132] Annie Kenney, *Memories of a Militant* (London: Edward Arnold & Co, 1924), p.133.

many other Lancashire towns, the political framework of respectability attached to the two existing political parties worked against the progress of the SDF.

Another substantial challenge placed before the SDF was when the two well-established political parties, Conservatives and Liberals, combined together. Bolton had a tradition of political cooperation amongst the established political parties. 'Party was never as all-embracing as in Rochdale and…there was a pronounced feeling (amongst the elite) of an urge towards amicable arrangement'.[133] A pact between the Liberals and Conservatives in Rochdale in the Guardians election of 1897 revealed the extent of this alliance. The socialists recognised that 'we may expect no quarter from the Liberals, they are in fact our avowed enemies'.[134] The winning general election candidate in Burnley in 1910 was a Tory, Gerald Arbuthnot. Workers may have been prone to Conservative policies of 'supremacy over the seas' and 'protection of empire markets', but they were swayed by local issues too. Arbuthnot contended that is victory was partly because 'Lancashire Churchmen, Roman Catholics and Wesleyans are as determined as ever to fight for their schools'.[135] A local journalist likened Arbuthnot to a hero:

> Not tall, but compact and clean limbed, clean shaven and with hair well brushed back, there is an expression of pugnacity about his face which inspires respect, and a powerful pair of shoulders increase it. It is a masterful face marked by a flexible mouth, a slightly receding chin, and a prominent nose. A bull-terrier type of man, a man ready for a rough and tumble fight, but a man who likes to win.[136]

The columnist drove home the weight of local circumstances and urged workers to vote for Arbuthnot 'for the sake of the poor families whom the radicals and socialists seek to deprive of their children's earnings'.[137] 'Half-time' circumstances relevant to

[133] Garrard, *Leadership and Power in Victorian Industrial Towns*, p.162.
[134] *Rochdale Labour News*, May 1897.
[135] *Burnley Express*, 15 January 1910.
[136] *Ibid.,*
[137] Ibid.,

Burnley were persuasive and these town descriptions and issues add weight to the importance of local focus. In addition, Conservative and Liberal parties would make local alliances with each other to prevent socialist and labour success. When the socialists were routed in the municipal election in Burnley in 1922, the *Burnley News* emphasised that the electoral competition ought to be read as a socialist poll versus an anti-socialist poll.[138] Similarly, when Irving was re-elected as MP for the town the same year, the local press bemoaned that 'the only way in which the socialists could have been beaten was by a combination of the anti-socialist forces'.[139] Difficult as it was to win an election against one opponent, events show that, in Lancashire at least, the two main parties would make commitments with the sole purpose of defeating the SDF.

A second feature of SDF opposition could be located in paternalism. Though a somewhat amorphous concept that is difficult to assess, many examples exist of mill owners who made social bonds with workers that were reflected in popular support and/or political voting. Mrs Kirby's recollections of working as a weaver in Rochdale would not be unusual 'Harvey's Mill dominated our lives and the surrounding districts. Those who did not work at Harvey's wanted to'.[140] The detailed contributions of gifts and favours to mill workers by well-respected and esteemed employers in mill towns raises doubts as to how successful socialist inroads could be. Previous local investigations have also highlighted the complexity of paternalism. Joyce's investigation of Blackburn stressed the dominant role the socio-economic environment played in influencing voters. [141] In contrast, V. C. Barbary's study of Bury emphasises local political issues were central to voters' decision-making processes.[142] The truth may lie somewhere between both positions but the point of interest for this study is that Lancashire towns, despite their over-arching cultural similarities, possessed different socio-economic structures, traditions and trade councils and would each have

[138] *Burnley News,* 4 November 1922.
[139] *Burnley Express*, 18 November 1922.
[140] Roy, MacElwee, *The Remarkable Reign,* Touchstones Archive Rochdale, Local History Collection. Ref, M31, p.106
[141] Patrick Joyce, 'The Factory Politics of Lancashire in the Later Nineteenth Century', *The Historical Journal*, 18:3, 1975, pp. 525-553
[142] V. C. Barbary, 'Reinterpreting Factory Politics in Bury Lancashire', *The Historical Journal*, 51:1, 2008, p. 143

their own particular version of a mill town culture. Nevertheless, paternal and familial relations were enhanced and reinforced by the conspicuous participation of local elites in charitable undertakings and these events were reported in the local press. This helped to 'enhance the elite's visibility but also to increase and generalize the legitimacy thus gained'.[143] Lancastrian employers' long-term influence was reflected in the extent of distinct employer areas and neighbourhoods across the county. Platt's of Oldham was the largest engineering employer in the world, 'Nat' Eckersley and the Earl of Crawford had a significant industry in Wigan; the Hornbys were the largest employer in Brookhouse in Blackburn and 'in small towns a single family could dominate. The Ashtons in Hyde, the Pilkingtons in St. Helens, the Garnetts in Clitheroe'.[144] When the eldest son of a mill owner was married in Nelson in 1902, all of the 1,140 workers received a new shilling, tobacco and chocolates.[145]

Like in the other mill towns, the Burnley SDF would have to compete with paternalism. During the Brierfield educational crisis of 1902, Messrs Tunstills and Sons, the local mill owners, 'gave a donation of £35'.[146] When Arthur Dugdale of Lowerhouse Mills married in 1895, the entire workforce was conveyed to Blackpool by train and each person was presented with a half-crown.[147] Such social collaboration created bonds of loyalty and cooperation. Patrick Joyce has provided Lancastrian examples of employer patronage and intimidation and argued that the internal machinations of local politics was the 'central role of the factory system beyond doubt'.[148] Other mill towns reveal similar patterns that suggests paternalism was predominant in the towns. Individual employers with several decision-making roles across township authorities were evident in Accrington, Ashton and Burnley. The Thursby family in Burnley not only ran the largest coal mining company but also served as guardians, magistrates', governors

[143]Garrard, *Leadership and Power*, p.29.
[144] Patrick Joyce, 'The Factory Politics of Lancashire in the Later Nineteenth Century', *The Historical Journal*, 18:3, 1975, p.543.
[145] *Nelson Chronicle*, 28 November 1902 & 17 April 1903.
[146] *Burnley Express*, 5 February, 1902
[147] Trodd, 'Political Change', p.150.
[148] Joyce, 'The Factory Politics', p.541 and 528.

and churchwarden.[149] During the unemployment crisis of 1908, Nelson town council received a £100 donation from the Astley Family towards the distress fund.[150] In 1907 in Colne, another small Lancashire mill town, population 22,000 in 1900, newspaper columns recorded more contributions, six named local benefactors of charities to the sum of £44 13s 5d per year.[151]

As Hill has noted, understanding workers' culture with a focus on localism would be a decisive factor in understanding Lancashire politics. One man who understood this was Blackburn MP, Harry Hornby. The many forms of common experience of working men - working hard in the mills, drinking, gambling and making financial ends meet - was where the real significance of popular politics was located and mill industrialist, Hornby, found a tap into this common experience. Such was Hornby's success that 'Hornbyism' became a culture in itself in the town where 'cockfighting, drinking, and dog racing…were uppermost in their [workers] minds'.[152] The Hornby family tradition and spirit garnered the appeal of the workers. 'The family exercised the virtues of 'spirit' and 'pluck' in sport – ancient and modern, played and patronised'.[153] In addition, it was said that the Hornby family had invested about £30,000 in the local Conservative Party and that Harry regularly contributed to every local charity organisation. The thrust of Hornby's political message was ground in localism and cotton. His election propaganda argued that people should 'vote for men who have known you a lifetime, who have contributed to almost everything in the town, from a boys' football and cricket club to bazaars of all denominations…vote straight for th' Two Owd 'Uns'.[154] This focus on being a part of the Blackburn industry and its people was most effective. Blackburn workers lauded 'th' owd gam Cock' at every turn. When the Bank Top Working Men's Conservative Club was opened in 1868, the press reported 'how does it happen that if you make inquiry you find that the hands of

[149] Alice Russel, 'Local Elites and the Working-Class response in the North-West, 1870-1895: Paternalism and Deference Reconsidered', *Northern History*, Vol. 23, Issue 1, 1987, pp. 156-158
[150] *Burnley Gazette*, 5 September 1908.
[151] *Colne and Nelson Times*, 11 January 1907
[152] *Blackburn Times*, 23 January 1904.
[153] Joyce, 'The Factory Politics', p. 552.
[154] P. F. Clarke, 'British Politics and Blackburn Politics 1900-1910', *The Historical Journal*, 12:2, 1969, p. 308.

Hornby hardly ever make any change? The reason is because they know the worth of their master'.[155] Another weavers' operative noted how 'when he [Hornby] went through the mill yard he would not pass the commonest man in the place without speaking to him…unstudied directness, almost roughness of his tones'.[156] Sir Harry was the century-long symbol of local Toryism whose popularity was set at odds with the world of the 'progressive' and temperance and education. Hornby clearly had a capacity to intuit and identify with the constituents of his town. As Patrick Joyce noted, 'Hornby dynasticism engaged tribal notions of honour and rightness and created a swathe of support amongst many workers because it responded to what drew men together and not what forced them apart'.[157] The nature of the Lancashire towns, often dominated by one industry, no doubt fostered a closer interdependence between employers and employees and provided another particular social context which Hornby and other mill owners could foster and exploit. It was a specific feature of mill town life that the SDF activists would find hard to break and difficult to emulate.

A final hindrance to SDF development would be the increasing popularity of a growing Labour Party. Initially led by Ramsay Macdonald as unpaid Secretary under the title of the LRC, the progress of this fledgling labour group reveals a number of matters. The influence of national politics on local, the importance of the appeal of reformism over revolution, and, lastly, how the SDF branches were often ill prepared and inadequately supported. Two political events in the first decade of the twentieth century highlights these features.

At the beginning of 1902, the Clitheroe and District Socialist Council (the Parliamentary division that Nelson was then part of) sent the *Nelson Chronicle* its most recent resolution 'that we run a Socialist Trade Unionist candidate at the next Parliamentary election'.[158] The Council went on to invite unions, trade councils and

[155] *Blackburn Standard*, 8 July 1868.
[156] *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph*, 18 November 1899.
[157] Joyce, 'The Factory Politics, p. 553.
[158] *Nelson Chronicle*, 17 January 1902.

Clarion fellowships to send three delegates each to the selection meeting in Nelson on 25 January. 'For unknown reasons this conference was never held'.[159] In March of that year, the Nelson weavers voted 4,995 to 628 to affiliate to the LRC.[160] That spring the sitting Liberal MP, Sir Ughtred Kay-Shuttleworth, was promoted to the House of Lords. The weavers' union chose the Secretary of the Darwen Weavers Association, David Shackleton, to be their representative. Union weavers were levied an extra 6d per member to create an election fund for Shackleton, which would amount to £450.[161] That 3,515 female members of the 6,287 in the weavers' union were contributing financially without suffrage was not a feature that Shackleton would focus on. Shackleton had worked as a weaver as a boy but was a known Liberal supporter and a member of Blackburn Chamber of Commerce. He had no liking for SDF socialism whatsoever. Dan Irving was quick to make the point. On 7 July on a piece of vacant land in Bradley, Nelson, Irving told the gathered crowd that 'he had worked for social reforms for 9 to 10 years and he had never heard the name of Mr Shackleton associated with any real effort to uplift the workers'.[162] Irving concluded that a meeting would take place on Saturday afternoon in Padiham to decide if the SDF would run their own candidate. At Shackleton's first speech on Monday, 21 July, ILP leader D. Omerod enthused that 'Mr Shackleton in the coming fight would stand to represent labour in the truest sense of the term'.[163] The 'sense' Omerod was referring to was the parliamentary respectable reformism of trade unionism, importantly, a political position only finely different to that of local SDF activists, a subtly not recognised by many. The SDF were unable to pose a serious challenge to Shackleton. They received an ambiguous lead from London: 'Headquarters responded by saying there was no reason either to support or oppose'.[164] The local branches were, once again, short of guidance, time and finances. Two days before the election a conference was held in the small hamlet of Brierfield. Shackleton was aided by Lady Dilke and weavers' President David Holmes. Present too was SDF member Selina Cooper. Cooper

[159] Frank Bealey, 'The Northern Weavers, Independent Labour Representation and Clitheroe, 1902', *The Manchester School,* 25:1, January 1957, Footnote 1, p.38.
[160] Howell, *British Workers*, p.63.
[161] Jill Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel* (London: Virago Press, 1984), p.122.
[162] *Nelson Chronicle*, 11 July 1902.
[163] *Nelson Chronicle*, 25 July 1902.
[164] Ross M. Martin, *The Lancashire Giant, David Shackleton* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), p.36.

said of the meeting that 'it was one of those rare moments when people who had previously been sworn enemies, or were soon to fall out bitterly with each other, congregated together on the platform'.[165] This was the moment when the SDF began to split with the ILP in Nelson. Though the SDF were still contributing towards Cooper's Board of Guardians expenses, Cooper could accept Shackleton. She was one of the first SDF members who took the road to socialism that was closer to reformism than revolution. Many other Lancashire SDF members would follow the same path. Shackleton was elected to Parliament unopposed on 1 August 1902.

The significance of the Shackleton candidacy is four-fold. It damaged the long-standing alliance of cooperation in Nelson between the ILP and the SDF. It showed weavers would vote for a Labour candidate who had Liberal sympathies and who was not overtly pro-suffrage. It also revealed significant strategic weaknesses within the SDF. A local January conference failed to materialize that might have provided an alternative candidate and a list of four candidates names sent to London for consideration failed to materialise.[166] The SDF Executive gave the local branches an all too frequent open-ended and ambiguous lead to neither support nor obstruct Shackleton. The three SDF branches, Nelson, Clitheroe and Burnley, attempted to respond, but were at odds over Shackleton's suitability from the beginning.[167] Finally, the local branches could not locate and support a credible alternative candidate and the end result was that members took the lead from Clitheroe in a 'wait to learn campaign policies of candidates'.[168] Running political candidates at any level required funding and all too often the gathering of monies was implemented in a milieu where nominees had little behind them except 'the wholehearted enthusiasm of the members of the SDF…and unbounded faith in the cause they espoused'.[169] After the SDF withdrawal from the LRC in August 1901, trade union funding was cut off and the local branch was dependent upon raising their own monies and/or receiving donations, being neither

[165] Liddington, *Respectable Rebel*, p.125.
[166] Martin, *The Lancashire Giant*, p.36.
[167] *Northern Daily Telegraph*, 11 July 1902.
[168] Martin, *The Lancashire Giant*, p.37.
[169] Edmund and Ruth Frow, '*Radical Salford*', Episodes in Labour History, Working Class Movement Library Pamphlet, Published by Neil Richardson, 1984, p.22.

large nor regular. The Clitheroe event supports this study's argument that the particulars of a local district are vital if we are to fully comprehend local SDF actions and that local events sometimes combined with national undercurrents to impact SDF politics. At the end of the by-election, *Justice* would bemoan how 'men of Mr Shackleton's type are just the men wire-pullers of capitalist parties will welcome'.[170] *The New Age* went one better and presciently stated that 'we can recall nothing more significant than this in modern political history'.[171] Unbeknownst to Nelson SDF it was a prediction that was part of their process of demise and absorption into the Labour Party of the future.

That same year of 1902, the JEC in Rochdale agreed to choose Sam Hobson as their candidate for the 1906 general election. Hobson was an SDF intellectual who would not compromise his interpretation of socialism, a characteristic that distinguished a new third party threat.[172] In 1906, Hobson would now have the unthankful task of being flanked from three sides, the Liberals, a vociferous Liberal press and most unexpectedly the leadership of the national LRC. Hobson opened his campaign by informing trade unionists that 'he himself was a Socialist but not all trade unionists were Socialists, though they ought to be'.[173] James Firth, the Secretary of the Rochdale Trades Council, wrote to Ramsay MacDonald complaining that people 'would vote for an avowed Labour Candidate, but will not work with some of Hobson's leading supporters'.[174] The national LRC now set about trying to remove Hobson from the candidature. Hobson related how

> Hardie asked me to withdraw. I asked why. He thought I ought to stand for a more hopeful constituency. I smiled pleasant incredulity. He was annoyed…..John Penny, the secretary of the Party, came to ask me to withdraw. I

[170] *Justice*, 9 August 1902.
[171] Bealey, 'The Northern Weavers', p.60.
[172] S. G. Hobson, *Pilgrim to the Left* (London: Edward & Arnold & Co, 1938), p.28.
[173] *Rochdale Observer*, 20 December, 1904.
[174] Coney, 'The Labour Movement', p.93.

asked why. 'Because', said he, 'we want Rochdale to bargain with for somewhere else'. I happened to know it all along.[175]

Coupled with the pressure from the national LRC the *Rochdale Observer* spared no punches, 'he is not a labour candidate, he is not even an official nominee of the ILP. He is one of the very small class of isolated Socialist candidates'.[176] The Catholic Church condemned Hobson too. Dean Chipp, parish priest at St John's, the largest parish in Rochdale, noted in the *Rochdale Observer* that 'I am unable to see how any Catholic can, with any easy conscience, vote for anyone who advocates Socialist principles'.[177] A final assault on discrediting Hobson was conducted just a few days before the election by a leading Liberal. H.D. Rattray brought to the town's attention that Hobson was a partner in a capitalist cotton speculative company. Hobson's energies were deflected into a libel case. Supporters of Hobson remembered the 'bitterness of the attack on Sam Hobson'.[178] Another SDF member was subjected to a routine media assassination.

Hobson's candidature was an example of how the LRC's national executive ambitions clashed with local circumstances and how once again the Lancashire environment presented an independence of action that was hard to curtail. While Hobson and the local socialists were only concerned with fighting the good fight, leadership figures behind the scenes were becoming anxious as their goals were threatened by a local political situation beyond their direct control. In the end, the election result was a victory for the Liberal candidate Harvey with 5,912 votes. Hobson's stand demonstrates that the press, the leadership of the LRC, the local textile union leadership and the Catholic Church were all hostile to SDF success. Yet, despite all these attacks, Hobson received 2,206 votes, 19.5%, of the votes cast, and the highest ever recorded by a socialist in the town. Hobson claimed that half a dozen other socialist candidatures could also have been nominated in 1906 if local groupings had been as cooperative as the SDF and ILP in Rochdale. 'Had it not been for the ILP leaders

[175] Hobson, *Pilgrim*, p.111.
[176] *Rochdale Observer*, 30 December, 1905.
[177] *Rochdale Observer*, 23 December, 1905.
[178] Living History Workshop Group, Rochdale Local History Archive, 'Do You Remember Papers', ref BO2, p.51.

there would have been at least six. The local branches were willing, and I could have found the candidates'.[179] Hobson's assertion will forever remain conjecture but it reinforces the position that the SDF and ILP were cooperative at branch level and reminds that the Lancashire context was most influential and particular.

The competition for votes would increase yet further after the passing of the Trades Dispute Act 1906 and 'the lead in social reform was soon taken over by Lloyd George and Winston Churchill'.[180] Now more progressive forces competing for electoral success would face the SDF. On the ground, the local branches of the SDF would face a growing Labour Party. By 1911, a direct challenge from the Labour Party in Rochdale would reveal the growing fissures. The Labour Party and the SDF both claimed the right to run a candidate for the town. The Labour Party chose Ben Turner from Batley. Socialists crowded the selection meeting at the town hall and extraordinary scenes occurred. Ironically, G. N. Barnes, the original SDF candidate from 1895, was the principal speaker. When asked from the floor why the word socialist had been deleted from the Labour constitution he replied that 'it had never been claimed by any Labour man of standing that the Labour movement was a Socialist movement. Most of the men preferred to get what they could out of legislation to being Socialists mouthing shibboleths by the fireside'.[181] The audience responded with the cries of 'Liar!' and uproar followed. John Moore of the SDF mounted the stage to a din of noise and confusion. Eventually, the vote was organized and carried in favour of Ben Turner and the meeting broke up in disorder. The local SDF was reaching a watershed but not one always of its own making. Like so many other Lancastrian towns, Rochdale had begun its metamorphosis towards the Labour Party. By the general election of January 1910, the Labour Party contested more seats than ever before in Lancashire and its full-time agents had increased from 17 in 1912 to 80 by 1918.[182] By 1918, the 2,206 votes that had been cast for Hobson twelve years earlier had transformed into 4,956 votes for Labour man, R. H. Tawney.

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[179] Hobson, *Pilgrim*, p.112.
[180] Paul Adelman, *The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945,* (Harlow: Longman publishing, 1996), p. 40
[181] *Manchester Guardian*, 11 July 1911.
[182] Keith Laybourn, 'The Rise of Labour and the Decline of Liberalism', *History,* 80:25, 1995, p.212.

Liberalism, paternalism and the growing Labour Party opposition to the SDF raises questions about other histories of the SDF and demonstrates the need for more local study. The political context contained a Liberal Party that had a long history of political influence within cotton orientated trade councils. It was a Liberalism that could align itself with the Conservatives to oppose socialism, and it was sufficiently popular to attract many workers' votes. Liberal municipal candidates George Wilby in 1911 and Lydia Kemp in 1912 were two candidates who 'demonstrated that the Liberal Party were willing to accommodate candidates who may well otherwise have drifted over to the socialist'.[183] Vitally, for the SDF islands, the political fight in every location, though extant under the umbrella of a general mill town culture, would be parochial and unique. SDF activists were working in mill towns with a general all-pervading culture that simultaneously were particular and different environments that required different responses. Bolton was Conservative dominated. Nelson, on the border of the West Riding, had a proliferation of Methodist influences and chapels and a growing ILP. Burnley possessed a large recalcitrant and suspicious mining company and Rochdale was the home of the Cooperative movement. Moreover, though SDF mill town responses and actions could be principled and are often labelled as radical, they all too often look and sound decidedly more reformist than revolutionary. At the ceremonial SDF club opening day in Rochdale in 1895, SDF leader Tom Whittaker made no reference to revolution or Marx, just that members had grown and struggled in this 'hole of Liberalism'.[184]

The Labour Party secured forty-two seats at the December 1910 general election and the SDF in comparison contested and lost two seats, at Burnley and Rochdale. Though unsuccessful, Lancashire was still of great importance to the SDF. Mill town branches of the SDF were bound by the intricacies of local politics. Negotiation and alliance making was an integral part of local reality and the SDF programme was close enough to the centre of politics for both the Liberals and the Labour Party to replicate it. Of

[183] Garner, 'Municipal Liberalism', p.38-41.
[184] *The Rochdale Times*, 13 April 1895.

overriding importance to all parties was the factor that town issues, weavers' wages, housing and mill conditions, were the most influential factors that dominated voters. Gauging the effects of paternalist influence on workers is difficult but Hornby in Blackburn illustrates how creating social relationships with workers at a local level was one key element to developing political support. SDF branches were federal, independent 'islands' about to be abducted by the majority of labour men who would follow MacDonald and Snowden into the House of Commons. All of this study's Lancashire mill towns that had active SDF branches and election candidates at the turn of the century would later become Labour Party seats. Shackleton had won Clitheroe (later to become Nelson) as early as 1902, Gill won Bolton in 1906, Irving finally won Burnley in 1918 and Stanley Burgess became the first Labour Party MP in Rochdale in 1922, winning the seat with a 15,774 vote or 38.8% of the vote.[185] The amalgamation and consolidation of the many socialist and union groupings, which became the Labour Party after the First World War, was in fact the net result of many years of socialist endeavour prior to 1918. The Labour Party did not need the SDF to win its election in 1929 but it would have had considerably less supporters in Lancashire if the branches of the SDF had not existed.

Electioneering

Up until now, the historiography has presented SDF electioneering as a record of dismal failure. As Walter Kendall concluded, 'enough is known to indicate that the organisation did not achieve more than marginal success in this field'.[186] This study reveals a picture with a different and more complex emphasis. Overall, the party utilised a key strategy I have termed, 'fight the good fight'. On nearly every occasion, this entailed SDF activists competing in as many election contests as possible with little recourse to planning, finances or a more long-term strategy to be more effective. The electoral strategy was politically flawed and would prevent greater success, but there

[185] *Rochdale Observer*, 28 December 1940.
[186] Walter Kendall, *'The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-21'*, (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), Appendix 6, p. 315

were some positive outcomes to SDF local agitation that until now have remained hidden.

Nationally, the party was not successful. With finances always short, Hyndman failed to capture Burnley on three separate occasions and another strategy I have termed 'duality' was utilised all too often. To no avail, Dan Irving implemented the duality strategy, wherein he acted as a candidate and an electioneering agent simultaneously in three separate localities on three occasions. Locally the party was more successful and this was based upon a degree of organisational success. Local ward activists managed to achieve some victories based on their good local administration, prominent personalities, a focus on first-hand political issues and trade union connections. In addition, local events remind that cooperation between the socialist groupings could be productive pending on unique political circumstances in each town. Furthermore, it is important to revise simplistic terms of national political demarcation, which were often blurred in the reality of compromise. As Jon Lawrence has acknowledged, 'it is all too often assumed that the world of working-class politics can be understood simply by deploying categories … to divide the labour movement into its component parts … individuals frequently shifted between these supposedly discrete ideological positions'.[187] At first, the SDF appears intransigent and limited in political success. Political tactics were at best lacking, but if we view election campaigns from a local perspective then there were pockets of successes with hard fought victories, which were adding to a counter culture of socialism. More importantly, this socialist support can be seen as seed sowing for a socialist ideology, which would pave the way for a future Labour Party.

Local elections in Accrington highlighted a few initial branch difficulties, such as financial problems, the existence of other workers' groupings and the strength of the Liberal Party. In December 1893, the local press announced that SDF party agent, A. G.

[187] Eugenio F. Biagini and Alastair J. Reid, *Currents of Radicalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1991), Jon Lawrence, Chapter 4, Popular Politics and the Limits of Party, p. 83

Wolfe, would contest the up and coming election. Readers were informed that Wolfe had been chosen by the local Independent Labour Party and would run as an 'Independent Socialist' candidate. However, in the mid-1890s, several local labour groups existed in different mill towns and nomenclature can be a misleading issue. Not necessary socialist or particularly representative of labour, one such group, calling itself the Accrington Labour Party, raised its concerns: 'officials of the Accrington Labour Party issued a manifesto enjoining the electors to vote for Mr. Leese (Liberal) as the candidate whose programme most nearly approaches that of the labour party'.[188] Three days later and Mr. Shaw Maxwell, the organizing secretary of the SDF arrived in Accrington to investigate the validity of the SDF position. Maxwell, in liaison with the ILP Executive, withdrew Wolfe from the competition, officially citing that finances required to contend the election, £200 or £300, were not worth expenditure and with only one week left to polling 'there is very little time efficiently to work up the constituency'.[189] Though finances repeatedly reveal themselves as an SDF electoral weakness, the incident reminds that the party would and could be challenged by other workers' groupings and that some of these were still prepared to support Liberalism to achieve ends.

However, a spirit of compromise appears often and repeatedly in the mill town branches that enabled some local SDF success. The activists were often autodidacts who had grown up imbibed in a trade council environment where negotiation had produced workers their only gains. They had worked through existing trade union pathways and realized the value of compromise. At times, they were certainly more radical than other voices of labour but only on occasion were they alienated because of a doctrinarian political position. In the autumn of 1888, the Bolton SDF competed in the School Board elections with J. Shufflebotham, a cobbler, as their candidate. Tom Mann read out the SDF School Board programme at the candidates meeting on 12 November. It included the abolition of school fees, free school meals and the provision of secondary education. Shufflebotham came last out of fifteen candidates with 3,406

[188] *Accrington and Observer*, 13 December 1893
[189] *Ibid.*, 16 December 1893

votes; a Catholic priest headed the poll with 11,704 votes.[190] Religion was apparently still more influential than socialism in parts of Lancashire. Most interestingly, though, both SDF members, Toothill and Shufflebotham, were invited to sit on two new union committees. That they accepted, Paul Harris argues, 'shows a new willingness to work with the trades council Liberal bloc, now emerging as a united leadership of labour, and [this] reveals a spirit of compromise not previously associated with the SDF'.[191] Even more importantly, this conciliation created a culture of cooperation and a network of political alliances that the SDF branches could build upon.

In Burnley, party action shows further cooperation, which challenges the prevailing historiographical focus on SDF intransigence. In the 1893 elections, the SDF ran five candidates in nine contested wards. The *Socialist* proclaimed that 'THE TWO POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE COMBINED, to prevent the return of Labour candidates…we hope you will at once become alive to this fact and AS WORKERS ALSO COMBINE'.[192] SDF candidates amassed a respectable number of votes. John Sparling came second in the Fulledge ward with 386 votes, only 24 votes short of the winner and in Burnley Wood ward, John Tempest, SDF member and union official of the Twisters and Drawers Union, won for the SDF with 688 votes to 561, a majority of 127 over a Liberal Gladstonian.[193] Tempest's affiliation to his union may, or may not, have been more important than his affiliation to the SDF but it most certainly provided him with the necessitous bridge of 'social relationships' that Hornby had utilised so well in Blackburn. A leading member of the SDF and a trade unionist had won one of the first political seats for the party and the branch had polled a significant total of 1,774 votes. Only a few weeks later and the party was in action again, this time in the municipal elections. This time three candidates were entered and John Sparling was successful in Burnley Wood ward beating another Liberal Gladstonian 582 votes to 535. Councillor Tempest rose to the occasion hoping 'before long to fly the red flag from the Town

[190] *Bolton Evening News*, 24 November 1888.
[191] Harris, 'Class Conflict', p.38.
[192] Hill, 'The SDF In Lancashire', p.50.
[193] *Manchester Courier*, 2 November 1893.

Hall'.[194] Hopes may have been running high but the SDF were in the ascendency. The 'stage army' in Burnley town had gained a foothold, in part, because Tempest and Sparling were prominent union officials. As Hill noted, 'by assiduous whipping of the social democratic membership it proved possible in 1894' for the Burnley SDF to infiltrating the weavers unions and redirect their involvement to issues beyond industrial questions.[195] Not only did they now have two men on the council, but earlier that year had secured two more influential positions for the SDF: John Markham to the Vice President of the Weavers Association and James Roberts to the trade council.[196] These events illustrate that the SDF were engaged in working within trade unions to gain political success, that at times they were successful and that the attitudes of the Burnley Weavers Association (BWA) leadership and the rank and file weavers could sometimes be at odds. Municipal support for the SDF could be located in the county's history of dissent. It could be attributed to the inevitable industrial conflicts that arose at the end of the nineteenth century. The primary influences, though, were more mundane and individual. Success and support was dependent upon the good organisational work of Irving, the social relationships that Tempest and Sparling fostered in their wards and the determined efforts of a handful of SDF trade unionists.

Dan Irving's 'larger than life' relentless presence in Burnley also epitomises one of the key driving forces behind SDF success, the power of individual agency within the story of the SDF. Irving's political objectives centred around 'socialist municipalisation' and at local level he was irrepressible. From the outset, Irving was surrounded by confrontation. He was forcibly evicted from the Starnthwaite socialist colony in 1893 and extraordinary undertakings followed in his wake. Selina Cooper's daughter related how 'he'd a wooden leg…anyhow, he used to get so worked up, did Dan, he'd take his wooden leg off and start hitting people with it!'[197] In 1901, when Irving's motion that 'all ordinary and special meetings of the Board shall be open to the public' was

[194] *Burnley Gazette*, 21 November 1893.
[195] Ibid., p.51.
[196] Hill, 'The SDF in Lancashire', p.50.
[197] Liddington, *Respectable Rebel*, p.116.

defeated, Irving resorted to unconventional direct action.[198] In July that year, Irving and six other socialists illegally occupied the Guardians Board Room. 'The police were called … Irving had to be forcibly removed'.[199] More was yet to come. During the 1905 municipal electoral campaign, Irving was accused by his opponents of using a forged letter as part of his campaign literature. Irving promptly sued for libel and issued a writ, 31 October 1905. He never missed an opportunity to assert his rights or defend the workers. It was typical Irving, irascible, determined and unbending, but to his long-term credit and eventual success, he was also fair and principled. Crucially, these latter factors were what would benefit Irving in the future when the Labour Party went looking for parliamentary candidates. That the Labour Party chose Irving to run for them as parliamentary candidate in 1918, speaks volumes as to how not distant, the two socialisms of Labour and the SDF would become.

Disagreement and discord between the SDF and other socialists would occur across mill town trade councils and SDF municipal success would often be transitory or pyrrhic with the force of trade union influence and finance always palpable. In Rochdale in November 1900, the SDF insisted on running a candidate at the school board election, Ada Nield Chew, even though ILP member Peter Lee was already a school board representative. The result was that neither socialist was elected and rumours abounded that the ILP was losing members and support because of the SDF's tactics. In July 1901, on behalf of the national LRC, S. D. Shallard visited Rochdale and recommended that the local ILP remain in alliance with the SDF. Later, more trades council conflict would occur. In October 1904, the Gas Workers sent a letter to the trades council requesting that local socialist societies be admitted as delegates to the Council. The senior textile unions' delegates were abhorred and the resolution was defeated 29 votes to eight. Unrelenting, in July 1905, Michael Ashworth, of the Newsagents Society, proposed that 'the Committee of the Council call a meeting of all Trade Union, Socialist bodies and Co-operative societies for the purpose of taking into

[198] Ibid., p.115.
[199] Lawrence Chew, 'Dan Irving and Socialist Politics in Burnley 1880-1924', *North West Labour History*, no. 23, 1998/99, p.6.

consideration the question of forming a LRC on the national basis'.[200] The textile delegates adjourned for a week. When the trades council reconvened a tumultuous meeting ensued. Charles Redfern opposed the motion claiming that if the election committee had not been successful it was only for want of effort. John Keely of the Cord and Blowing Room Workers claimed 'a socialist clique desired to break up the trades council'.[201] Uproar followed and the meeting was almost abandoned. Ashworth the original proposer demanded, 'how it was that the textile workers of Lancashire should always be a drag on the wheels of progress…..He had watched the work of the trades council for 20 years and a more miserable fiasco he had never seen'.[202] The motion was finally and dramatically carried 20 votes to 17. Just two months before the general election, the Lib-Labs had lost control of the trades council. The upkeep of the alliance with the ILP and the subsequent trades council victory could only ever have been achieved by local activists utilizing a local system of alliances and contacts. The trades council forum reflected the inroads the SDF activists had made. Yet, the trade council take-over would prove a bitter victory for the SDF. In November 1905, the first meeting of the Rochdale and District LRC took place. The Card and Blowing Room operatives, Power Loom Weavers and Spinners and Operative Piecers Association all withdrew from the trades council. SDF political advancement would proceed falteringly without trade union money. It would not be the last time that SDF progress was thwarted by the membership volume and financial strength of the trade unions.

Towards the end of SDF municipal contests, utterances of disenchantment would echo in Burnley, now for different reasons as the Labour Party began to gain ground. In 1909, the Burnley Trades Council withdrew its financial support of SDF candidates and Irving would speak of 'the schism which now divided the socialist parties locally'.[203] By 1911, the last occasion that the SDF would contest a council election in Burnley, the ILP and the SDF both opposed each other with their own separate candidates in St Andrews Ward, neither party was to be successful. Irving frustrated at this situation

[200] Coney, 'The Labour Movement', p.91.
[201] Ibid., p.91.
[202] Ibid., p.91.
[203] Chew, 'Dan Irving', p.7.

noted at 'the apathy of the working classes towards municipal elections'.[204] Notably, Irving preferred to emphasise workers' indifference and not that two 'Left' candidates may well have split the vote and prevented a socialist victory. Blaming the workers instead of their own in-fighting or poor political strategies was a theme too often repeated. During the municipal elections in Burnley in 1922, ten wards were contested. Nine of the socialist candidates now ran as Labour candidates. Irving ran as the sole socialist.[205] Irving lost his ward seat but won the general election. Local and national politics were truly very different spheres.

At the national level, the SDF was even less successful. The 'fight the good fight' strategy was maintained and made even less viable when a policy of 'duality' ran parallel. Coupled to these weaknesses was a meagre financial election chest, a lack of skilled political candidates, opposition from trade council Liberals and a growing Labour Party who were willing to make alliances with the Liberals. The general elections of 1895, 1900 and 1906 in Rochdale highlighted some SDF progress in the town. Three 'Left' candidates would receive the joint support of the ILP and the SDF. In 1895, the first avowedly socialist candidate in the town, George Barnes, received the support of the SDF on 9 July 1895. In May of that year, the trades council refused to support Barnes.[206] The trades council were opposed to a candidate running on a purely socialist platform. Nevertheless, Barnes fought the election on the platform that the two established parties were identical and indifferent to the working class.[207] The general election result was a narrow Conservative victory and an unimagined Liberal second place. Not since the Conservative victory of Sir A. Ramsay in 1857 had the Liberals lost control of Rochdale.[208] Barnes had done well and polled 1,251 votes, 12% of the total vote. 'It seems clear that the relentless attack upon the Liberal Party by the socialist groups and, in particular, the ILP, undermined the established two-party system by placing before the electorate the possibility of a viable third alternative'.[209]

[204] Ibid., p.7.
[205] *Burnley News*, 4 November 1922.
[206] Ibid., p.51.
[207] Ibid., p.51-52.
[208] Heywood, *New Annals*, p. 183.
[209] Coney, 'The Labour Movement', p.54.

The local SDF activists had been able to make good electoral progress based on a socialist reformist ideology. Rochdale was reflecting a national trend that reform not revolution could make progress.

Unfortunately, for the national SDF, there would be very little more to celebrate. During the 1904 by-election campaign in Accrington, the weight of the LRC influence began to emerge as a secret political pact with the Liberals began to impact. In May 1903, the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners Federation (LCMF) and the Accrington trade council chose miners' representative T. Greenall to be their candidate. From afar, Ramsay MacDonald was in pursuit of a Liberal/Labour concordat and was anxious that the miners and socialist candidate T. Greenall withdraw from Accrington. MacDonald had already written to Greenall: 'may I urge you not to waste yourself upon that constituency…information has been placed before us which shows us that…..Accrington is not a bit good'.[210] By the autumn of 1903 national machinations had moved forwards and local activists were becoming aware of a lack of national support for Greenall. Soon Arthur Henderson and John Hodge of the LRC arrived in Accrington to persuade Greenall to relocate and a miners' committee reviewed the issue and indicted Greenall for a lack of energy.[211] Caught in the middle of a larger political game Greenall and the Accrington saga show us three issues. First, that the aims of a national leadership, in this case the LRC, could be at odds with local socialists. Second, that the LCMF could also be prone to such divergences between agents and local activists, and, third, that elements of the labour movement, both local and national, could and would still ally with the Liberal party.

In 1906, Dan Irving was also in Accrington, now contesting the parliamentary seat and simultaneously acting as H. M. Hyndman's election agent at the seat in Burnley. This incredible undertaking I have termed a strategy of 'duality'. A lack of funding, trade council division and a media onslaught would be the three characteristics of Irving's

[210] Scott, 'The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners', p. 134
[211] Howell, *British Workers*, p. 33

defeat. From the very beginning, Irving was plagued and harassed by the press. First, a rumour spread that Irving was sick and was to withdraw. In January, another story spread that another socialist candidate would run. By 13 January, it was revealed that this new candidate, a certain Bill Bailey, had retired from the election on account of 'mill collections have not come up to his expectations'.[212] Irving's staff was not without its own monetary restrictions. 'The thing that matters most about this week's meetings, a local socialist told me during the week-end, is the amount of the collections. They still need more money, and plenty of it before the demands of the Returning Officer can be met'.[213] A character assassination of Irving was printed in the *Accrington and Observer* on 16 January. 'It [Irving] is a negative character, and shows itself in noisy and vulgar declamation and personalities…Abuse of his colleagues; defiance of the chair; and blocking the business of the Council'.[214] The press pointed out that Irving did not actually attend several meetings and scoffed, 'the Socialists are this week engaged in a proceeding something akin to playing Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark'.[215] Progress was made more difficult when the local trade council, in official support of the SDF candidate, encountered internal voices of dissent. 'Mr Black (Tramway and Vehicle Workers) said the secretary of his society had not been appointed and he did not think his society would care to be mixed in that matter'.[216] Irving was vilified in the press, opposed by other labour candidates, not wholly supported by the local trades council, had difficulty in raising election finances and was opposed by Liberal stalwart Joseph Leese, MP for the town since 1892. That Irving lost the election was no surprise. That he managed to poll 4,852 votes, a most respectable 38.3% of the vote, was remarkable.

The Accrington general election reinforces three elements of mill town localism. First, the hostility of Liberalism and the press knew no bounds. In the age of limited media communication, the sway of the press against socialism could never be

[212] Accrington and Observer, 13 January 1906.
[213] *Ibid.*, 9 January 1906.
[214] *Ibid.*, 16 January 1906.
[215] *Ibid.*, 9 January 1906.
[216] *Ibid.*, 13 January 1906.

underestimated. Second, the internal disagreement between the forces of the 'Left' inevitably reduced Irving's chances. The existence of two independent labour candidates, one retiring before the election and then one appearing on the final count at the end of the campaign (Holden came last with 619 votes) would have encumbered. Third, and most importantly, the implementation of poor SDF national electoral strategies was unchecked in 1906. *Justice* spoke of Irving's ability to win but acknowledged euphemistically that 'we are a little handicapped through our comrade Irving having to devote his time in Burnley'. Irving's end of campaign speech noted that 'the fight for their veteran Comrade Hyndman was a thousand times more important than a fight for himself', and finally that 'the best way to kill an enemy was to break his head whenever they could get at him'.[217] From this it is clear that the local branch had been unprepared, that Irving had great respect for Hyndman, which may have compromised his political judgement, and that Irving was still committed that the 'fight the good fight' policy was the best strategy forward. At the beginning of Irving's campaign, Irving had boasted to the press that 'I am not so easily killed by work…last night when I was going home at twelve o'clock I thought it would be a good thing if the days were for the time being more than twenty-four hours long'.[218] Unfortunately, for Irving and the SDF, it was not the volume of time required to win that was the problem, but the quality of the time implemented.

Between them, Hyndman and Irving contested four general elections each, three of which occurred simultaneously and they were defeated every time. Evidence is scant regarding a reason for this dual political strategy but several factors provide an indication as to reasoning behind this strategy. The first indication of Irving's zeal to travel and help others came in October 1900. The minutes of the Burnley Trades Council noted Irving's absence as he was otherwise engaged in helping George Lansbury fight an election in Bow and Bromley, 450 miles away in London.[219] Hyndman's respect and support of Irving leads one to believe that the influential Hyndman, more so than the SDF, held Irving in high esteem and would thereby choose

[217] *Ibid.*, 23 January 1906.
[218] *Ibid.,* 6 January 1906.
[219] Chew, 'Dan Irving', p.6.

him as an organizer and candidate simultaneously. Another factor that would have encouraged a dual strategy was simply the lack of strong local candidates that the SDF could locate and utilize. This in turn raises questions about the number of SDF members in the mill towns, their lack of oratorical skills and their desire to take on what could be a personal and vilifying ordeal. In addition, it would be foolhardy if we were to ignore Irving's pugnacious personal character. The attraction of a 'charge of the light brigade' stance, despite the overwhelming odds, would suit Irving to a tee. Irving's political make-up suggests that he simply did not know how to turn down a chance to fight. As he himself said in his election address at Rochdale that January, he was 'one of the victims of the capitalist system'.[220]

The duality strategy reflects well the problems of this island party and reinforces the central argument of this thesis. The SDF in Lancashire was neither homogenous nor doctrinarian and often dependent upon the influence of a few resilient and determined personalities. Even when the national party, represented by Hyndman and a mill town branch leader in Irving, attempted to work together, the lack of electoral foresight and the federal nature of the party prevented success. Irving had a good rapport with Hyndman and Hyndman noted that Irving was as 'breezy as the sea on which he sailed'.[221] Moreover, this relationship between the two leaders was crucial in many respects for the failure and success of both. Hyndman's marginal defeat in 1895 and his near victory in 1906 by a few hundred votes would have convinced Hyndman that Irving had almost been successful and could perhaps win next time. Irving's loyalty to Hyndman was never in doubt. 'Irving became a close associate of Hyndman, following him into the National Socialists in the war.'[222] Hyndman's overt trust in Irving and Irving's loyalty in Hyndman lead both, with few other options, into a political dead end. In addition, local politics could also be truly parochial. Irving had a strong political base in Burnley. Only a few miles up the road in Accrington or Nelson his popularity would not have been the same. His achievements in Gannow ward or in respect to support of the Burnley Miners lodge would have meant little elsewhere. The result was

[220] Ibid., p.9.
[221] H. M. Hyndman, *Further Reminiscences* (London: Forgotten Books Reprint, 2002), p.511.
[222] Trodd, 'Political Change', p.331.

that Irving was opposed by a labour group, of some capacity, in all of his national elections outside of Burnley. Finally, the strength and influence of the federal nature of the party would be constantly problematic. Despite being opposed in January 1910 by the ILP, the Labour Party and parts of the trades council, Irving was still the Rochdale SDF branch's favoured candidate. Paradoxically, local Lancashire independence had prevailed and simultaneously failed to assist the party in achieving success.

Another unprepared SDF approach to national elections occurred at the by-election in North-West Manchester in 1908. Irving had not yet tired of the 'fight the good fight' stance. He claimed that in Manchester 'socialists must accept all opportunities offered to them'.[223] Chew referred to it as a farcical contest: 'he (Irving) was entirely unknown in the area, had no printed electoral literature, few venues were booked for him to speak and his supporters who were mainly from the Jewish community had to resort to chalking his policies on the pavement'.[224] This election again demonstrated the lack of electoral preparation of the SDF and witnessed another media offensive. Irving was subjected to ridicule: 'it is a pity that the excellent fare provided by the two protagonists (Churchill and Joynson-Hicks) should be interfered with by the hopeless vapourings of Mr Irving whose following is so small or should be at all troubled by a collection of 'ists' as varied as it is unreasonable'.[225] On the same day, the Manchester and Salford Trades Council hesitated in supporting Irving's candidacy. The *Manchester Courier* provided a long diatribe on the 'disconsolate' mood of the socialists.[226] This type of newspaper coverage when repeated became a potent force that could sway voters. The SDF need not have bothered turning up, but as always, well prepared or not, they did. On 16 April, Irving challenged Churchill from the platform, he was 'prepared to meet Mr Churchill on any platform and crumple him up like a piece of paper'.[227] Despite these valiant efforts, the result was a crushing defeat. Joynson-Hicks (Conservative) won with 5,417 votes and Churchill got 4,988 votes. Irving received a

[223] *Manchester Guardian*, 13 April, 1908.
[224] Ibid., p.8.
[225] *Manchester Courier*, 14 April, 1908.
[226] *Ibid.*, 16 April 1908.
[227] Ibid., 16 April 1908.

miserable 276. The decision of the SDF to proceed in Manchester is lost somewhere between Hyndman and Irving and an inflexible but detrimental fight the good fight policy. The key process of the selection of SDF candidates for election was punctured with problems. The party was invariably unprepared and financially at a disadvantage. Irving was the leader of the SDF branch in Burnley and was held in high esteem. However, local loyalties were truly parochial and not all labour men were equally enamoured. Factions within the Manchester trades council had expressed reservations and once again, this electoral event mirrors the islands within islands highly provincial nature of the branches. The SDF was not a standardised single entity party attempting to implement a coordinated single ideology.

That the SDF had some success in local politics is undoubted. Dan Irving sat on the school board, the Guardians and the town council. The LRC in Burnley put up candidates in all twelve wards for three years in succession from 1906-1908. Redoubtable characters such as Irving would have played a very significant role in this mill town agitation. J. Shufflebotham was elected to Bolton School Board.[228] By 1906, the SDF were contesting three wards in Bolton.[229] Even in ILP dominated Nelson, the SDF would still field a municipal candidate in 1908 in Netherfield ward.[230] In Padiham, Edmund Parkinson would be elected to the town council as the first socialist candidate in 1911.[231] In Rochdale, for over almost 50 years, from 1872-1920, socialist and SDF electoral participation (not including Trade Council or Labour candidates) was extensive and would also have long-term effects. In Rochdale in 1906, James Hannah ran in Castleton east ward as a socialist and the Liberal Party expressed begrudging respect: 'but in one respect the socialists teach both the other parties a useful lesson. They are always making speeches and holding discussions…..their societies are councils of war in almost continual session'.[232] Despite a shortage of financial resources and an extremely biased press, the SDF of Rochdale competed in 74 separate municipal

[228] Denis Pye, *History of the Bolton Branch of the WEA*, Bolton Archives, BRN 1404265, p. 31
[229] *Bolton Evening News*, November, 1906
[230] *Nelson Leader*, 6 November, 1908
[231] Seth Sagar, 'Memoirs', *North west Labour History Bulletin*, Vol 1.9, 2008, p.16
[232] *Rochdale Observer*, 3, November 1906.

elections and three general elections before 1906. Indeed, socialists held seats on the town council consecutively from 1898 to 1908 and the SDF was the dominant socialist party in town prior to 1910. Of the fifteen socialist municipal candidates 1901-1905, two were ILP men and the others SDF/socialist.[233]

Though the SDF only secured one municipal election seat in Burnley in 1907, what is most compelling is the total number of votes cast. The table below accounts for SDF ward election results in Burnley 1907.

Table Y. *Burnley Gazette*, 2 November, 1907

Ward	Liberal	Conservative	Socialist	Labour	Elected
Daneshouse	913			566	LIB
St Andrews	900	286	950		SOC
Stoneyholme	484		470		LIB
St Peters		534	153		CON
St Pauls		454	239		CON
Whittlefield	577		299		LIB
Lowerhouse		755	507		CON
Gannow		851	622		CON
Burnley Wood	830		723		LIB
Fulledge		816	304		CON
Healey	622		278		LIB
Trinity		711	376		CON

The socialist candidates attracted a total vote of 5,467 as opposed to 4,407 for the Conservatives and 4,366 for the Liberals.[234] If municipal elections are approached from a long-term socialist perspective, wherein every candidate was spreading further the message of social reconstruction based on more workers' representation in parliament, then the SDF was unconsciously paving the way for the Labour Party of the future.

[233] Coney, 'The Labour Movement', p.84.
[234] *Justice*, 9 November, 1907

The SDF islands were so much more than a sect on the periphery of politics; they were a long-lasting vibrant group of socialist counter culture makers. At a national level, the SDF never won a single parliamentary seat. Some SDF executive dissatisfaction at the Hyndman/Irving dual approach to electioneering did surface. In January 1910, the executive expressed its concern: 'for financial reasons the SDF executive were not in favour of contesting Rochdale and Burnley together'.[235] Then again, after the defeat of Hyndman in December 1910, 'we had no chance of fighting more than one seat, that at Burnley, and the success of comrade Hyndman ought to have been assured'.[236] Nevertheless, the national party continued to abide by a federal structure and the branches persisted to spread the socialist message in Lancashire. The fact that this type of local success was rarely repeated elsewhere suggests that Lancashire was a unique context. Specific conditions correlated which enabled this engagement. These included driven individual activists, an industrial environment interspersed with strife and existing institutional forums for political engagement. As Crick concluded, 'the point about the SDF is that it lasted'.[237] These incidents of electioneering activity from Lancashire's mill towns tell us much more about SDF activism in action than hitherto expressed. They go beyond the broad sweeping strokes of traditional historiography and provide us with an insight into actions and responses of a SDF counter-culture that was resilient but, all too often, incorporated a poorly designed electoral strategy.

In the Streets

Another core feature of the SDF struggle in Lancashire was to be found, quite literally, on the streets. Agitation on behalf of the unemployed and fighting for freedom of speech on the marketplaces and byways of Lancashire would also characterise SDF political engagement. Both causes were played out in the public environment and

[235] Ibid., p.9.
[236] *The Social Democrat*, December 1910.
[237] Crick, *The History of the SDF*, p.297.

involved confrontational clashes with the authorities. Both issues would demonstrate once again that the party contained little central policy direction and that actions and responses would be dependent upon innumerable and uncoordinated individuals. From the very first political engagements, the branches supported the unemployed. Moreover, the fact that the control of unemployment relief agencies was in the hands of locally elected bodies in Lancashire encouraged the local SDF members to initiate their own independent campaigns against local authorities. The Lancashire context and the numbers of unemployed determined the type of SDF activities and responses. In mill town Lancashire, where the weaving industry was extensive, unemployment was often alleviated by the mills implementing a strategy of short-time, wherein cotton operatives were employed for a shorter working week to reduce the impact of a downturn. However, the economic crises of 1904-05 and 1908-9 resulted in a growing body of unemployed men 'monthly unemployment peaks sometimes as high as 10 per cent were reached during 1884-5, 1887, 1892-5, 1904-5 and 1908-9'.[238]

The unemployed demonstrations received media attention and became part of the radical SDF tradition, which 'functioned primarily as an attempt to pressurize those local representatives of State power who seemed immediately threatened by popular agitation'.[239] This was important for the direction of the future party advancement because by 1904 street agitation became an outlet where the SDF could be seen to be acting. Like a self-fulfilling prophecy, street notoriety would lead to yet more street action. It was a political strategy that would not be portrayed as respectable or attract votes. The *Manchester Guardian* derided the unemployed land occupation in Levenshulme as a 'Holiday at the camp'.[240] The SDF's capacity to impact in the arena of unemployment was always limited on several levels. The agitation was too easily associated with radicalism foreign to England, and the street agitation and inevitable bouts of violence that followed demonstrations 'came to be regarded in the public

[238] Donald Read, '*The Age of Urban Democracy: England 1868-1914*' (London: Longman Press, 1994), p. 282

[239] Alan Kidd, 'The Social Democratic Federation and Popular Agitation Amongst the Unemployed in Edwardian Manchester'*, International review of Social History*, 29:3, 1984, p.357/358.

[240] *Manchester Guardian*, 7 August, 1906

imagination as a question of public order' instead of workers solidarity.[241] These actions also enabled critics and even so-called supporters to stereotype the SDF. Sydney Webb infamously described the SDF as 'the nonentities…fanatics, cranks, and extremists'.[242] Another difficulty of the unemployment issue was that it was a transitory topic, always tied to the economic buoyancy of the market and when the economy recovered unemployment lapsed as an issue.

Another key difficulty was that all too often labour agitation was consistently uncoordinated. In Blackburn, SDF members were active in the fight against unemployment but reveal a political engagement that was characterised by cultural misunderstanding and a diversity of initiatives without central guidance. In October 1908, the SDF held a series of meetings on Blakely Moor. A Saturday afternoon meeting was attended by approximately fifty people, and another gathering on Tuesday afternoon was attended by two thousand people. SDF men E. Atherton and J. Holden addressed the Saturday meeting. Atherton discussed a recent letter from Bishop Thornton to the press, which chastised men who had disturbed the equanimity and sacredness of a church service. Atherton mocked the letter, suggesting to the crowd that 'the Parish Church is no place for you….it is reserved for the swaggering brewers, tricky lawyers'. He concluded accusingly by stating that 'what I am surprised at, is that you people take this lying down'.[243] At the second meeting on a Tuesday, ILP councillor Higham appealed for six unemployed delegates to go with him in a deputation to the Mayor. Higham ended his address most revealingly by urging the large crowd to study employment and elections, for 'they should think as much of them as of football and horse-racing'.[244] A little later, the SDF parliamentary candidate for Ashton-Under-Lyne, William Gee, visited Blackburn in March 1909. Gee lambasted the Labour Party as an 'uncompromising failure so far as the requirements of his class went'.[245] In contrast, at the nearby Socialist Hall, local SDF leader Tom Hurley

[241] Kidd, 'The Social democratic Federation', p. 357
[242] Beatrice Webb, *Diaries*, (Northeastern: University Press, 2001), 19 May, 1930.
[243] *Blackburn Times*, 17 October 1908.
[244] *Ibid.*, 17 October 1908.
[245] *Ibid.*, 20 March 1909.

celebrated the twenty-five year anniversary of the branch on Water Street. Hurley spoke of his pleasure at the formation of a Woman's Circle, the need for education of the younger members and that 'the branch was one of the strongest in the kingdom'.[246] The Blackburn SDF men and socialists highlight the individual nature of socialist actions and opinions. Atherton displayed condescension and an inability to understand workers' priorities. Higham had recognized that sport and gambling were what his audience considered of importance, Gee focused on the Labour Party's inadequacies and Hurley had been busy nurturing the development of his local branch. Though local and national SDF priorities could sometimes converge they could just as easily be quite separate and different, a factor that would always hinder one effective SDF position. SDF unemployment agitation in Blackburn was disparate and certainly not reflective of one synchronised political party. The key problem was the street forum had a limited capacity to enhance the SDF's influence and may well have hindered more than encouraged.

Two aspects of the SDF's unemployment struggle highlight its nature and difficulties. First, Atherton's comments and critique of workers reveal the re-occurring and underlining problem of many SDF Lancashire activists. They rarely fully comprehended the culture of the very workers they were fighting for and underestimated how a hard working weaver may prefer a pint or a bet on a horse more than he/she would attend a political rally. Second, the news reporting was one of many instances that coloured people's perceptions about the SDF and stereotyped the party into political marginalization. On 20 July 1906, the *Manchester Guardian* reported the forcible eviction of SDF men from an unemployed 'land grab' site in Broughton. In a farcical style, the newspaper depicted the leading SDF man, Smith, as overweight, 'of Falstaffian proportions'. The eviction was 'carried out so pleasantly, although determinedly, that the people who saw it laughed heartily during the short proceedings'. The article concluded derisively by noting that 'a considerable trade is being done by the 'unemployed' in the sale of pictorial postcards of the scenes in the

[246] *Blackburn Times*, 20 March 1909.

encampment'.[247] The Liberal press created a damaging image of the SDF and its members which was at odds with mainstream respectability and which could injure the party significantly. The consequences would relegate the party's influence and portray its image and members as unworthy scoundrels, which the majority of the mill town members were not.

Running parallel to the unemployment struggle, the mill town branches engaged in another street encounter that would further disparage their image. In the late 1890s, town councils in Lancashire refused to allow open-air socialist meetings and this led to a long and embittered battle over the issue of free speech. In June 1894, the Colne branch of the SDF sent a deputation to the town council to enquire as to the usage of a local outdoor gathering place known as 'The Recreation Ground'. The SDF members were informed that the landlord objected to the property being used for Sunday meetings.[248] In defiance, 'Free Speech' meetings were immediately organized for the following next two Sundays, with W. Horrocks of Manchester and J. R. Widdup of Burnley the invited guests.[249] Two months later, the SDF agitators were in Colne Magistrates Court. The newspapers summarized the decision as a defeat for the SDF. Two of its members were fined one shilling or seven days in prison and they agreed not to meet again. To complicate the result, the chairman of the court had noted that the police and the SDF had reached an agreement to 'keep off all the highways' and 'keep the footpath clear'. The *Socialist North East Lancashire Labour News* reported that the 'unprincipled liars' of the press were incorrect in their summation. The party had been granted permission by the police to meet in Cloth Hall Yard. 'Now that our comrades in Colne have won the right to meet…they will be able to carry on their outdoor propaganda work without fearing any further conflict with the police'.[250] The Colne SDF had set a precedent on the principle of free speech. This would guide the mill town branches into a spiral of confrontational politics with local authorities. The strategy and scene was set for future law-breaking tactics by the Lancastrians, which

[247] *Manchester Guardian*, 20 July, 1906.
[248] *North East Lancashire Labour News*, 1 June, 1894.
[249] *Ibid.*, 1 June 1894.
[250] *Ibid.*, 10 August 1894.

would enhance neither their image nor their political support. When unemployed workers in Burnley stormed the town hall in 1908 the local press belittled the measure as 'farcical' and proceeded to ridicule the event by recording that the mob had got lost once inside the building and ended up besieging the toilets instead of the council chamber.[251]

In Nelson, the fight for free speech would highlight the different approach to politics of the SDF and the ILP and reveal a workers' preference for the latter. In June 1897, Nelson SDF organized an open-air meeting in the town, which *Justice* editor Harry Quelch was invited to address. Quelch was arrested and the SDF subsequently organized free speech meetings in Burnley, Wigan and Accrington. Nine years later and the battle for free speech continued. One Tuesday evening in 1906, the Chairman of Nelson SDF, Bryan Chapman and an accomplice, Ernest Marklew, attempted to address a crowd of between 150-400 people in the market hall in Nelson.[252] Both men were arrested and sentenced, Chapman to one week in prison and Marklew two weeks.[253] In May 1907, three more members of the SDF were in court for obstruction. Albert Leach, a grocer from Burnley, Maurice Cayley, a weaver from Nelson and Joseph McGlasson from Manchester, a prominent SDF man who had been lecturing in Burnley in October 1902.[254] The cases are noteworthy because they reflect different factors of SDF localism. First, Leach called John Tempest as a witness. Tempest was a SDF member from Burnley, which tells us that individual SDF members in North East Lancashire often supported each other. Second, the different places of abode of the SDF dissenters suggests that although nearby branches assisted in local actions, the case of Mc Glasson implies that individual SDF members implemented their own propaganda at their own individual discretion. Leach was fined 40 shillings or one month imprisonment, Cayley's case was dismissed and McGlasson was fined 20 shillings.[255]

[251] *Burnley Gazette*, 31 October, 1908
[252] *Nelson Leader*, 26 May 1906.
[253] *Ibid.*, 1 June 1906.
[254] *The Pioneer*, October 1902.
[255] *Nelson Leader*, 24 May 1907.

Nelson SDF leader Bryan Chapman had to contend with a strong ILP, local circumstances, national events and sometimes the interplay of both. In the early years, the local Cooperative Wholesale Society played an indirect role. Though overtly non-political, the Cooperative Society was very much involved in workers' everyday lives. It helped people by providing cheaper food products, encouraging saving and giving workers the benefit of the notorious 'divi'. Three members of the Nelson SDF, Birtles, Horsfall and Jonhson, all worked in or chaired cooperative stores and meetings, and this would have involved the cooperative movement in socialist politics more so than in areas where the leadership was non-political. This organisational infrastructure of Nelson contributed to the type and form of socialism in Nelson. The SDF islands were formed not only by their activists' personalities, but by their unique town profiles.

From 1906 to 1908, the relationship between the SDF and the ILP in Nelson became more strained as Chapman came into conflict with the town council. Simultaneously, national developments would be felt in town. David Shackleton was credited with persuading Asquith to introduce a Trades Dispute Bill and would rise to acting chairman of the Labour Party in parliament during Hardie's illness in 1907.[256] The fortunes of the SDF by comparison were not good. The SDF Executive and Conference voted down initiatives taken to re-affiliate to the national LRC. In the light of these national actions, Chapman steered local branch actions. The Nelson SDF were preoccupied with their outdoor freedom of speech activities, in which Chapman was arrested for defying the council's restrictions on public gatherings. In May 1907 the SDF were expelled from the Nelson LRC. A jubilant *Nelson Leader* reported that 'the surprise if any is that the LRC have tolerated the SDF for so long…The culminating point was reached when the SDF submitted a resolution making it incumbent on the labour members of the town council to do the bidding of the meeting of the LRC'.[257] For some historians, Chapman's arrest and insistence on making LRC resolutions binding in

[256] Roger Smalley, *Dissent* (Nelson: Nelson ILP Land Society, 2018), p.71.
[257] *Nelson Leader*, 31 May 1907.

the town council would leave his Nelson branch 'a propagandist body adrift from the only mass constituency it could hope to canvass'.[258]

In September 1908, when local unemployment reached 8.2%, Chapman led a party of unemployed people to the Mayor's house and protested outside his residence.[259] In stark contrast, ILP notaries such as Katherine Bruce Glasier were in the newspapers for opening the Nelson Socialist Institute with an orderly and peaceful procession, a choral choir and the laying of founding stones.[260] The ILP Chairman boasted they 'had now become respectable citizens'.[261] The ILP were successfully cloaking themselves in the air of 'respectable' politics, whilst the SDF were being portrayed as obstinate militant revolutionaries. The municipal election results of the period reflected the ensuing swing of support away from the SDF towards the ILP. In 1907, SDF candidate John Tempest, lost Bradley ward by 167 votes to 402. Five years earlier in 1902, the SDF had barely lost the same ward 860 votes to 868.[262] In November 1908, the municipal elections placed the plight of the SDF in perspective to their main socialist rival. The ILP won five out of the six town wards. In Netherfield ward, the only ward the SDF contested, the ILP were victorious. T. Caffry collected 584 votes. Second was a Conservative, S. Davies, with 540, and last was the SDF man Greenwood with a meagre 103.[263]

The in-fighting between the SDF and the ILP in Nelson ebbed and waned depending on the local issues at hand. Both parties were in accord over the 'municipalisation of drink' issue in May 1907 when pressure was brought to bear, unsuccessfully, on the town council to take a town vote.[264] A high point in cooperation between the two parties occurred in September 1912, when a proposed 'modus vivendi' document was

[258] Crick, *The History of the SDF*, p.195.
[259] *Nelson Leader*, 18 September 1908.
[260] *Burnley Express*, 31 July 1907.
[261] *Nelson Leader*, 2 August 1907.
[262] Crick, *The History of the SDF*, p. 218 Footnote 50.
[263] *Nelson Leader*, 6 November 1908.
[264] *Ibid.*, 17 May 1907.

published in the *Nelson Leader*. In essence, the Labour Party and the British Socialist Party agreed to 'cease all hostilities, agree to the public control of all social necessities and discuss with each other which wards to contest so as to avoid competing against each other'.[265] Equally unsurprising was a difference of opinion between both parties a year later, when both groupings could not agree on the issue of spending money to cater for the King's visit in August 1913.[266] The ILP and Labour councillors were 'respectably' in favour, the SDF opposed. Though Chapman publicly attacked Mayor Greenwood for 'slavishness to old vanities and institutions', it was the Mayor who best represented the gap between the socialist parties.[267] As a member of Nelson ILP and sitting in judgement over the free speech agitators, the Mayor noted 'personally he could not understand, for the life in him, what the socialists really meant … there was another socialist organisation in the town – of which he was a member – that had never gone into those streets'.[268] The ILP in Nelson had 'developed' so far that they were enacting law. In contrast, the SDF members still thought it necessitous to challenge authority and risk jail. Importantly, this dissimilarity was also the difference between a respectable socialism that could attract votes and a confrontational socialism that would not. When Martin Crick told us that 'by the turn of the century it is true to say that socialism had played an important role in forming the basis of a Nelson Labour Party', Crick was not explicit as to which socialism he was referring, though maybe both deserve acknowledgement for different reasons.[269]

These actions of SDF civil disobedience are noteworthy because no references were made to social revolutionary ideology in any of the challenges, a fact that strongly suggests that mill town SDF socialism was primarily about individuals and immediate local issues, and not revolutionary dogma. However, the free speech principle also highlights that the SDF activists did not comprehend that their actions would be interpreted by many workers and other socialists, like Mayor Greenwood, as

[265] *Ibid.*, 20 September 1912.
[266] *Nelson Leader*, 22 August 1913.
[267] *Ibid.*, 29 July 1910
[268] *Ibid.*, 24 May 1907
[269] Crick, *The History of the SDF*, p.113.

unreasonable and unnecessary. Blackburn's unemployment agitation reminds that ILP cooperation was ongoing in the mill towns, though as on so many occasions, the ability to unite behind one coherent socialist strategy a rare circumstance. Nelson's free speech fighters exemplified the determination of the SDF activists and the divide, in Nelson for certain and in most Lancashire mill towns, between the two major socialist groupings.

Street agitation or direct action became one part of SDF strategy for the mill town branches. During protests the SDF were at the forefront of resistance and could be seen to be the political grouping who led the dissent. However, street action was more detrimental than valuable and did little to increase SDF support. The SDF was portrayed by the press, and indeed by many reformist labour groupings as too radical. The SDF agitators in Manchester, Skivington and Smith, were referred to by their Labour councillor colleagues as 'Stevenson Square Demagogues'.[270] In the short-term, the SDF unemployment propaganda was directed at the jobless, a group possibly without franchise and least likely to be politically active. The free speech propaganda may have contained a theoretical argument but voting figures suggest the majority of mill town workers related to the Nelson Mayor's bewilderment. The mill town SDF activists did not understand that their principled actions would have a negative effect on their popularity. The SDF message was opposed sufficiently by their opponents and suppressed or transformed enough by the media to have little impact. It was poignant and persuasive that individuals of the local SDF branches, such as Chapman in Nelson and Arthur Smith in Manchester, were imprisoned. The nature of the struggle on the streets may have grabbed headlines but it would not grab respectable law-abiding mill town votes.

[270] Kidd, 'The Social Democratic Federation', p.350

The Complexity of Individual Agency

Individuals in action bring colour and life to the history of the party and provide an insight into just what SDF members did and why. Their stories and memories reinforce the interpretation that the SDF was not one a single political entity and more a wide cross-section of groupings, which, though at times similar in backgrounds and motivation, were heavily influenced by local circumstances, surrounding personalities and immediate political goals. Furthermore, individual agency reveals the difficult often very uncomfortable nature of late nineteenth-century politics and how all too often SDF individuals were at odds with the very workers they were trying to convert. These incongruent parts reflect much more accurately the character of this multi-faceted party and enhance our understanding that the singular history of the SDF falls short of a truer depiction of the party.

There are a few more factors one ought to consider when assessing mill town activists. The fractious nature of SDF members' social interaction is an issue too easily overlooked by national histories. Activists would encounter an array of trying situations, which could include personal attacks, personal rivalry and even critique from inside the SDF. Early examples of personal attacks are seen in the case of Tom Mann and John Tempest. Mann was hounded out of Newcastle before arriving in Bolton.[271] Tempest was elected as a town councillor for the Burnley Wood ward in November 1893. However, within two years he had left Burnley 'blacklisted by the employers and unable to get further work in Burnley, he was forced to take his family

[271] Torr, *Tom Mann,* p. 246

away from the town'.[272] Tempest was an object of industrial and political persecution. These local facts provide more accurate explanations in understanding the fortunes of SDF branches. Another aspect of discrimination, which would hinder SDF activists, was indirect bullying. Selina Cooper noted how both her husband and daughter were viewed with disdain by many people simply for having a familial tie to a socialist.[273] Seth Sagar of Padiham related how his son was bullied for being the son of a socialist and how his own mother in-law 'would spoil a good dinner by throwing out that I was a socialist, and how women were talking about it'.[274] Mill towns with a distinct body of mill owners and known neighbourhoods would make employment difficult to attain for well-known socialist 'trouble makers' who had been sacked once or twice. At the 1897 SDF conference, measures were taken to try and assist victimized members but as G. S. Horsfall of the Nelson branch noted 'men had been driven out of town for being prominent in the socialist movement and it was absolutely impossible for many of them to take any active part in local work'.[275] Personal attack was one aspect of the struggle that would impede SDF political progress.

The impact of personal rivalries would also affect SDF progress. At Bank Hall colliery in Burnley in February 1899, 145 men seceded from the central Lancashire and Cheshire Miners Federation (LCMF) Prosperity Lodge and began to take their own contributions, 'involved was an element of personal and political animosity between John Sparling and John Leeming, the leader of the Bank Hall men, who was politically and industrially more moderate'.[276] A court of arbitration was set up by the LCMF. Leeming led the critique of Sparling's control of the central Lodge arguing that extravagant expenditure and the conduct of official elections had witnessed 'the introduction of socialist politics into union affairs'.[277] The court of arbitration sat at the Weavers' Institute on 22 March and declared that 'we have carefully examined every part that was before us, and the rules of the federation….We therefore decide that the miners employed at the Bank

[272] Chew, 'Dan Irving', p.4.
[273] Liddington, *The Life and Times,* p. 153-154
[274] Seth Sagar, 'Memoirs', *North West Labour History Society*, vol. 33 (2007/8), p.17.
[275] SDF National Conference Minutes, 1897, p.19.
[276] Scott, 'The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners', p.103.
[277] Ibid., p.103.

Hall Collieries, Burnley, may become a separate branch of the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners Federation'.[278] SDF men and supporters of radical politics could be at odds even with each other. Moderates, like Leeming, were a constant challenge in recruiting supporters for the local SDF branch. Personal rivalries could have occurred in many other mill towns, and in Burnley at least, would have consequences for the success of the local branch. However, the point that seems most telling was the role of John Sparling. Just as Sparling wished to influence Burnley, Burnley had already influenced him. The mill town had provided him with a job underground, a God at the Hollingreave Congregational Church, Burnley Wood, and a pride in hard work. Injured in a pit accident at Towneley Pit on a Friday in 1897, Sparling was eager to inform the newspaper he would be back at work on Monday.[279] Sparling was able to be a member of the SDF, a member of the trades council and a Methodist. He fought disagreements with mine owners, LCMF officials and Lib-Lab mining representatives. As one local paper noted, 'he willingly and gladly gave his services and strong aid to any movement, religious or social, which he thought would help in the betterment and uplifting of all working men and women'.[280] It would appear that local SDF men did not necessarily have a stereotype. They were practical politicians who put the immediate needs of the workers before any dogma or political officialdom.

Internal critique from within the SDF would also test an activist's ability to endure. The minutes of the 1897 SDF National Conference reveal a pattern of internal bickering. Joseph Burgess was at odds with the local Blackburn JEC for approaching Liberal MPs to support him. The Hulme branch expelled James Leatham 'owing to some unfortunate circumstances of a private and domestic nature'; only to have their decision censured which led to Hulme's secession from the party.[281] In the mill towns, promising activists would also be reprimanded. A.G.Wolfe, who helped establish several Lancashire branches, would not avoid internal reprimand. The 1894 SDF General Council found it necessary to dispense with the services of comrade A.G.

[278] *Burnley Express*, 25 April 1900.
[279] *Burnley Express*, 24 July 1897
[280] *Ibid.*, 22 May 1940.
[281] SDF National Conference Minutes, 1897, August 1-2, Northampton, pp.11-12.

Wolfe as the official organizer of the SDF in Yorkshire 'by certain indiscretions in letters – writing and conversation, should have marred his otherwise most successful work'.[282] Yet, Wolfe was back in the field again in Lancashire later the same year. Even John Sparling was not spared the ignominy of expulsion. In November 1896, Sparling put himself forward for the town council elections in Burnley Wood ward as a 'labour candidate'. Irving took offence that Sparling refused to run under the term 'socialist' and offered Sparling the opportunity to attend an SDF meeting in the ward so that 'though not running for the SDF, avow himself a socialist', Sparling refused.[283] This left Irving smarting that 'for a man to deny his socialism in order to win non-socialist support is to prove that ambition has outrun principle'.[284] However, like Wolfe, Sparling would continue to work with and for the SDF for many years to come.

These aforementioned examples of social interaction may appear to be mundane and singular, but they remind of the complexities involved in any historical story and are intricate details that broad-stroke histories omit. As Walter Citrine pointed out, one SDF activist he knew on a Lancashire building site was hated by most of the other workmen, 'because of his sarcastic manner, and perhaps because he always defeated them in argument'.[285] Individual agency tells that the SDF history in the mill towns of Lancashire was so much more than a collection of historical sentences encapsulated in the clichés of 'inconsequential' and 'anti-union'. These nuanced details are the bread and butter accounts of an active federalist party. Though full of conflicting headstrong individuals, the mill town islands reveal a new picture of a socialist grouping. One that was not so very different to many other socialists but was derailed by a negative press, poor political strategy and its reoccurring inability to comprehend the many different facets of mill town culture.

[282] SDF National Conference, 1894, Marx Memorial Library, ref, YA04/REP, 00243868, pp.15-16.
[283] *Justice*, 28 November 1896.
[284] *Justice*, 28 November 1896.
[285] Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (London: Yale University Press, 2001), p.301

Conclusion

The activities and responses of the SDF islands was dependent upon of a host of powerful political and social factors. Vitally, to comprehend these factors one has to recognize that the party was not one single political entity but one that was built upon a federal structure of administration that created local versus national tension and enabled the branches to devise their own strategies and develop their own interpretations of socialism. This freedom of action was so pronounced that it is appropriate to label the branches 'SDF islands' and refer to their leaders as 'Crusoes'.

The Lancashire mill towns provided both structural pathways and erected barriers; they also unveil local indicators, which begin to re-write the story of the SDF. Industrial matters important to the weavers and miners would be key driving forces. Backing the eight-hour issue had a much greater chance of success than supporting a reduction for half-timers. The SDF-led Burnley miners' strike of 1901 was unsuccessful because it was confronted by the obdurate power of the Executors of Hargreaves and acquiescent LCMF officials. The 1906 secular education dispute in Burnley resulted in SDF defeat because the Burnley Weavers Association leadership 'abhorred socialism and its fear of a SDF hidden agenda to 'dominate and monopolize'.[286] Importantly, mill town cultural environments reinforced the understanding that respectability and sociability and the daily financial concerns of workers were of more influential importance than political affiliations. A set of weavers' values and conditions existed that SDF activists' did at times acknowledge but which all too often they did not comprehend. In parallel to this mill town culture, the island branches implemented a series of political strategies that were unsuccessful. Election strategies hinged on a 'fight the good fight' approach and 'duality'. Unfortunately, it was a strategy that spread financial and manpower resources thinly and one which produced little electoral success. Furthermore, an engagement in street politics through unemployed

[286] Hill, 'Lib-Labism, Socialism and Labour in Burnley', p.200.

and free speech demonstrations would neither raise the party's reputation nor the votes cast for it.

Crucially, to understand the SDF responses, one has to acknowledge that variances existed across the mill towns and that often these inconsistencies would be founded in distinct towns and individual actions. Despite mill town cultural consistencies, Barbary made a clear distinction that each town, in its own unique way, would and could contain specific variances. Unlike Blackburn and Burnley, Bury had a more diverse industrial structure and though 71 per cent of cotton mills, employing 86 per cent of cotton workers, were owned by Conservatives, the town never had a Conservative MP before 1895.[287] How a local SDF individual responded to a political issue could also have profound effects. The ideological appeal of the respectable ILP in Nelson, in contrast to the uncompromising law-breaking Chapman, was interpreted by the majority of labour supporters as a more palatable message. Dan Irving's opposition to the half-time system lost him and the SDF valuable support amongst the weavers. 'At his first meeting of the school board he antagonized the important Weavers … parents relied on their children's earnings, but Irving considered that this would not be so if free school meals and clothing were provided for the poorer children'.[288] Similarly, when activist Joseph Toole joined the SDF in Salford and noticed that the first objective on the party list was the abolition of the monarchy, his response was 'that it was such blatant … unnecessary objectives, which prevented the SDF from ever receiving general acceptance by the workers'.[289] These examples led the Lancastrians further away from the mill town workers and even further away from the homogenous picture of national histories. Importantly, though, historians' depiction of a dogmatic Marxist SDF does not hold in Lancashire. From Irving's school meals campaigns to Leonard's ethical holidays, little, if any, revolutionary fervour can be detected in the actions and utterances of the mill town activists.

[287] V. C. Barbary, 'Reinterpreting Factory Politics', p. 130
[288] Chew, 'Dan Irving', p.6.
[289] Joseph Toole, *Fighting Through Life* (London: Rich&Cowan Ltd, 1935), p.84.

This local investigation has unearthed details that the national picture has missed. SDF activists' were trade union members and did utilise those organisations to spread their message. Cooperation between other socialist bodies did exist and was often dependent upon each individual locality. Bolton SDF revealed that a mindful selection process of membership could be responsible, in part, for the relatively small branch numbers. Tempest, Widdup, Mann and Toole all demonstrated the fractious lifestyle of SDF activists and remind of the great personal toil and difficulties that men had to endure if the party was to succeed. Crucially, individual activists' interpreted socialism differently in each particular mill town and often SDF 'crusoe localism' was not that very different from the ethical socialism of the ILP.

The mill towns tell a different story to the accepted historiography. They tell that political theory was of less importance to the Lancastrians and that understanding and interacting with a workers' culture was a key to success that most SDF men ignored or fell short of. A political exchange recorded in Bolton in 1907 illustrates this point. Matthew Phair characteristically warned his audience that 'if they kept returning the class of men they had hitherto sent to the council then they were to blame if nothing was done for them'.[290] E. Marklew of Burnley SDF concluded that 'but for the socialists it would not have been possible to have had a Labour Party'.[291] One member was exhibiting the frequent SDF inclination to 'blame' workers while the other, perhaps unawares, was forecasting the near history of the party. The step many SDF members would take from the SDF to the Labour Party would reveal the similarity between the parties, and how the latter one ultimately benefitted from the long-time existence of the former.

[290] *Bolton Evening News*, 30 October 1907.
[291] *Bolton Evening News*, 30 October 1907.

Chapter 3

Socialisation and Distraction

The Social Democratic Federation would be assaulted and impeded by many obstacles in its attempt to bring about the social revolution. A long tradition of progressive Liberalism and the federal nature of the party were two key areas of opposition and weakness, the latter administrative feature revealing a paradox of branch independence but also uncoordinated party action. These features of branch autonomy and the individuality of party activists is a key factor to understanding that the SDF was not one homogeneous political entity but a mass of contrasting interpretations of socialism. However, in addition to these influential features there were other social and environmental factors, which also acted against the party. Ross McKibbin identified some of these difficulties, noting that the development of 'associational cultures' and the structure and dispersion of the British workforce meant 'there was thus no overwhelming grievance which could have united the working class against civil society'.[1] For McKibbin, associational life had a structural effect on workers' lives creating a world that he classed as 'fractious, partial and self-absorbed'.[2] The workers and weavers examples I have come across in this study, with their attention on family incomes, holiday savings and interest in football matches, certainly supports McKibbin. Similarly, Jeffrey Hill argued that a better understanding of the SDF could only be attained by investigating the cultural life of British workers and their developing relations with other groups. In addition, Hill questioned whether an ideological effect of leisure had been overlooked and queried how far the SDF had succeeded in creating a counter culture against leisure, 'perhaps its greatest enemy'.[3]

A mill town environment in Lancashire was shaped and stimulated by a host of factors. First, the commercial leisure explosion at the turn of the twentieth century resulted in

[1] Ross McKibbin, 'Why Was There No Marxism in Great Britain', *The English Historical Review*, 99:39, April 1984, p.330.
[2] Ibid., p. 328
[3] Jeffrey Hill, 'Requiem for a Party', *Labour History Review*, 61:1, Spring 1996, p. 107

a reorganization of how people spent their free time away from work. Football, music halls, sport and much more fought for the attention of the workers. Entertainment distractions became so pervasive that these elements affected workers' lifestyles to such an extent that they amounted to a significant challenge to the SDF. In turn, these distractions developed norms of behaviour and attitudes. A process of socialisation that included respectability, which admired hard work but frowned upon alien and Godless politics, hindered an SDF consistently depicted as atheist and foreign. Second, social change also encouraged many groupings to respond by forming alternative organisations, which competed alongside the SDF for recruits and attention. These organisations, in direct competition with the SDF, hindered socialism and explains partially the flaws of SDF politics. The failure of SDF activists was grounded in their inability to understand the importance of leisure and sport and the fundamental integrative role of social relationships. Third, the influence of gambling and drink also took its toll on workers and the SDF. Leslie Chapples could claim that Burnley was 'the most drunken town in England' with a record 309 licensed premises in 1895.[4] Many employers, especially Methodist temperance supporters in Lancashire, were keen to reduce the impact of drink upon mill production. 'Quite a number of people began to perceive working-class leisure as a problem'.[5] SDF members, like George Lansbury, bemoaned 'club life'. Following a tour of Lancashire in 1895, Lansbury felt that 'earnest revolutionary education was taking second place to drinking and other trivial pursuits'.[6] Fourth, by considering elements of apathy amongst workers and an indifference to SDF policies, enhances our understanding of how and why the SDF failed to infiltrate. As early as 1891 the *Labour Leader* complained of workers that 'either a national conservatism of disposition or an utter inability to appreciate the importance of the changes desired, has rendered much toil completely fruitless'.[7] The relationship between mill town culture and leisure provided the majority of workers with enough satisfaction not to implement a social revolution and added to the compliant culture of workers. In addition, when workers' causes were raised, SDF

[4] Leslie Chapples, '*The Taverns in the Town',* Burnley Historical Society Bulletin, Burnley and District Historical Society, no 8, 1986.
[5] Ibid., p.91.
[6] Hill, 'Requiem for a Party', p. 107
[7] *Labour Leader*, 7 November 1891.

members often misjudged the political situation, utilised inappropriate tactics or the cause was hijacked and championed by a labour grouping that was seen as more respectable.

The Lancastrian SDF activists remind that the failure of the party was not rooted primarily in anti-trade union politics or Marxist dogma but in more tangible and communal features as socialisation and distraction. Socialisation, the process through which people are taught to be proficient members of society by accepting and understanding societal norms and expectations, merged and developed with the great boom in commercial sport and leisure in the late nineteenth century. At the local level, mill town SDF branches had difficulties with finances and activists prioritizing their own particular issues rather than party doctrine, but they also had problems responding and adapting to the changing commercial environment. Mill town SDF branches found it difficult to compete with football and the theatre and were all too often portrayed by the dominant societal reinforcer, the local newspaper, as being outside the norm. A typical newspaper article of the era entitled , 'What Socialism is', related how 'socialism would destroy the family, break up the home and bring in something that they called 'free love'.[8] This chapter will examine the development of these features, look at SDF activists in their roles as propagandists and provide reasons why the vast majority of workers were not interested in a social revolution. In essence, the competition for workers' attention was intensive and SDF agitation did not invigorate a larger response because Blackpool promenade and the Football League was sufficient contentment for many.

The Lancashire Setting

Long before the SDF, leisure had been perceived as a threat to a stable working environment. The early nineteenth century would witness the rise of gin palaces and

[8] *Burnley Gazette*, 4 November, 1908

from 1830 onwards, any householder assessed for poor rates could obtain a license to sell beer. Traditional Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday football matches were critiqued by respectable tradesmen as giving rise 'to the assembling of a lawless rabble, suspending business to the loss of the industrious….producing in those who play moral degradation and in many extreme poverty, injury to health, fractured limbs and (not infrequently) loss of life'.[9] The rise of the seaside holiday resort incited socialist Katherine Bruce Glasier to describe Blackpool as 'hideous, full of unrest and fevered energy'.[10] Another perceptive socialist noted that 'capitalism is not altogether an enemy outside of us, but a foe in our own household with whom we have to grapple'.[11] Lancashire in particular was a county whose workers would be gripped by sport. Historians such as Adrian Harvey, Jeffrey Hill and John Walton have all provided evidence to demonstrate how Lancashire became 'the crucible in which a novel culture of commercial spectator sport, for overwhelmingly working-class audiences, could be forged'.[12] A body of evidence encompassing Lancashire leisure and its multiple distractions may not lead to an exact proof but it will provide us with a weight of reoccurring evidence, which will show an assortment of cultural and social challenges particular to Lancashire that the SDF would find insurmountable.

At the start of the nineteenth century, the informal practices of 'St Monday' were gradually being transposed to a more formal half-day Saturday. The change to an official one and a half day weekend began, '[when] an early Manchester initiative in the 1820s to close at 4pm was followed by more general early finishing at 2pm in the late 1840s'.[13] Around the same time, municipal initiatives began to appear and public services developed with the Museum Act of 1845 and the Libraries Act of 1850. Within this development both the social life of people and their expectations would alter. By the 1870s, the industrial weekend was well established. Within this formal free time,

[9] Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution* (London: Croom and Helm, 1980), p.78.
[10] Chris Waters, *British Socialists and Politics of Popular Culture 1884-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 38
[11] Ibid., p. 38
[12] John K. Walton, 'The Origins of Working-Class Spectator Sport: Lancashire, England, 1870-1914', *Social History*, Vol. 17, 2012, p. 126
[13] John K. Walton, 'From Institution to Fragmentation: The making and unmaking of the British weekend'*, Leisure Studies*, 33:2, March 2014, p.208.

workers' traditions grew: from receiving pay on Friday and going for a drink; to holding weddings at the weekend; to sending the children to Sunday School mornings; to going to the football match on Saturday afternoons. 'The industrial weekend was the leisure corollary of labour discipline…the strongly structured and regulated society – orderly, law-abiding and deferential'.[14] Gradually, the growing impact of leisure began to be felt as many workers chose to spend their disposable income on drink, betting, watching football or gambling on horse racing. These factors would affect mill town workers' opinions and attitudes and importantly provide them with a distraction from politics.

Intrinsic to leisure and its distractions was mill town culture, the particular type of environment and processes of socialisation that typified the majority of ordinary workers in Lancashire. In this study, I have looked at the wider cultural factors that influenced workers' predisposition, or not, to align themselves with political ideas espoused by the SDF. A predisposition that was affected by a host of factors ranging from media reporting to peer pressure but one which would be predominantly influenced by socialization and the daily life of earning a living and paying the rent. Here I have utilized a range of indices from language to first-hand contemporary accounts, to gauge this cultural presence. John Stott Travis's memoirs reveal a pattern of mill town workers' interests and lifestyle that was repeated many times across the county. Stott related how in Watergrove, a district of Rochdale, mill hands were just as keen as anybody at sports 'and would spend the summer evenings at cricket and the winter evenings at billiards'. Stott also recalled his father's advice 'if you want to know a person's character you must find what he does with his leisure'.[15] Such advice mirrors Jeffrey Hill's thoughts that 'sport and leisure are cultural agencies in themselves'.[16] Examples of mill town workers' sporting interests proliferate. The Hospital Cup in Burnley was a very popular football competition that had its origins in workers donating part of their incomes so that the hospital could exist. In February

[14] Ibid., p.211.
[15] John Stott Travis, 'Memoirs', Rochdale Archives, Ref G3 TRA, pp. 82, 57 and 48
[16] Jeffrey Hill, *Sport, Leisure and Culture in Twentieth Century Britain* (Eastbourne, Palgrave Press, 2002), p. 2

1900, the Cup had 'induced the capital entry of 44 mill and workshop teams'.[17] That same autumn the committee and collectors of the Weavers Association had a cricket match at Barrowford 'and as before the committee proved victorious, scoring 57 runs to the collectors 24'.[18] Alice Foley, a labour and union activist from Bolton, told how her father regularly consulted the *Racing Handicap* and of his other habits 'when father was recovering from a boozing bout, his temper was most vicious. It was then my job to fetch a gill of beer from the nearby White Hart. On arriving home with a jug of flat beer, I was greeted with a volley of oaths'. Foley also related the interests of some of the neighbours, 'a thin, bow-legged man who worked as a side-piecer in a cotton mill; he was a fanatical pigeon-fancier, and each evening after tea he released the birds from their cotes in the back-yard during which time he danced around and whooped excitedly as they flew off over the house-tops'. Foley also reflected on the ever-growing culture of rail excursions, 'finally like a flock of excited birds, we set off for the station. Excursion rates were extremely modest in those days – 2s 9d for adults, half price for children, and free for infants'. Finally, Foley related how time on the job was made more bearable when her work partner retold of her nights out in town. 'I recall how she recounted…..the thrill of The Silver King or the anguish of Lady Audley's Secret. This kept us going until the buzzer sounded at eight o' clock for the breakfast half-hour'.[19] The numerous references to leisure in Foley's memories are indicative of its growing importance in ordinary weavers' families.

In addition, in locating and investigating mill town activities we can note the particular influence of the cotton industry, with its periodic slumps and booms, the large mass of skilled but disenfranchised women and the plethora of socialization possibilities outside of work time. For the majority of mill town workers, leisure was time away from the mill wherein people could relax or pursue an activity in their free time. For many this meant participating in sports and/or hobbies such as football or fishing. For others it simply meant going to the pub or the working men's club 'for a pint'. Leisure activities would not be a fertile breeding ground for many revolutionaries.

[17] *Burnley Express*, 7 February 1900
[18] *Burnley Express*, 1 September 1900
[19] Alice Foley, *A Bolton Childhood* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973), pp. 27 and 51

In general, historians have argued convincingly of general trends and characteristics that are reflected in this study. At the turn of the last century, examples of socialisation exhibited that socialist activists and 'ordinary' workers would often hold divergent opinions. As Hobsbawm noted when discussing workers, 'I have deliberately avoided identifying the sentiments and opinions of the mass of workers, so far as we know them, with those of the avant-garde of activists and militants, because the two were plainly not the same'.[20] This particular argument is most often evinced in the forum of language. Contemporary socialist Brougham Villiers, though a member of the ILP, noted that 'that the average Englishman was quite unable to understand either the SDF or the [Socialist] League'.[21] Others have noted that workers were very rarely interested in changing the political status quo and many years after the SDF George Orwell could still make the point that:

> The first thing that must strike any outside observer is that socialism in its developed form is a theory confined entirely to the middle class. For it must be remembered that a working man…is seldom or never a socialist in the complete logically consistent sense…To the ordinary working man, the sort you meet in any pub on Saturday night, socialism does not mean much more than better wages and shorter hours and nobody bossing you about. To the more revolutionary type who is a hunger-marcher and is blacklisted by employers, the word is a sort of rallying cry against the forces of oppression, a vague threat of future violence…But I have yet to meet a working miner, steelworker, cotton-weaver, docker, navy, or whatever who was 'ideologically' sound.[22]

Hobsbawm's and Orwell's implicit suggestions, that a divergence existed between activists and workers and that workers were not interested in revolutionary socialism, are applicable to the SDF at our local level of study too but in ways that often entail nuanced and more complex interpretation.

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[20] Eric Hobsbawm, *Worlds of Labour* (London: Phoenix Press, 1984), p.209.
[21] Brougham Villiers, *The Socialist Movement in England* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908), p. 112
[22] Hobsbawm, *Worlds of Labour*, p.349.

The labour press relayed its own concerns about the changing environment and workers' political engagement. In the *Daily Herald*, the cartoon character of Henry Dubb represented the fear of a few and the truth for many. Dubb was the stereotypical un-class-conscious worker. Dubb was illuminating because at face value he represented what many perceived the workers to be: recalcitrant, unmotivated and disinterested. Yet, simultaneously, Dubb mirrors what many of the leading socialists believed; that their cause was correct and their audience manifestly dim-witted. Dubb illustrated two directly related but opposite ends of a dilemma. The suggestion that workers were not interested in socialism and that branches of the Lancashire SDF had no political strategy to compete with apathy. In the *Burnley Pioneer* in July 1902, a socialist noted the acute problem of unresponsiveness. He noted that 'living from hand to mouth, physically and intellectually, it is hard indeed to induce the workers to consider more than the day to day questions of their weekly toil and their weekly wage'.[23] The author was not Irving but the leader of the SDF, H. M. Hyndman. Sometimes, though far too infrequently, national and local SDF politics would be on the same page but neither had a workable solution to remove apathy or persuade workers to engage in their particular socialist solution. In Lancashire, socialisation and distraction were expanding rapidly and weavers appeared content with the small gains they could acquire from within trade unionism.

On the streets of Lancashire much of life, and importantly politics, would be affected and guided by mill life. In the year when the SDF was founded, the membership of the Amalgamated Weavers Association was 37,539, and by 1921 it had reached its peak of 224,219. The largest number of workers recorded working in the industry would be 621,516 in 1912 and the largest number of power looms used in production was 808,145 in 1915.[24] Over time and tradition, much connected to politics had been administrated and directed by the weavers' unions. In addition, this industry employed

[23] *The Pioneer*, July 1902.
[24] Edwin Hopwood, *A History of the Lancashire Cotton Industry and the Amalgamated Weavers Association* (Manchester: Amalgamated Weavers Association, 1969), pp. 188-196.

an unusually large percentage of women. This made the mill towns unique in that they possessed many independent working women who, through mill work, possessed a unique experience of socialisation and union engagement. Yet, vitally, the 1902 election of the moderate Liberal, David Shackleton in Nelson, reflected the influence of the trade unions and the conservative political tendencies of male and female weavers. In the mill towns of Lancashire, when trading was good the half-time system provided many homes with a 'family' wage. This was a position Alan Fowler considered 'a lifestyle that was envied'.[25] Into the twentieth century, a modest but patchy amount of disposable income saw the rise and institutionalization of hire-purchase, altering the interiors of workers' homes. The mass production of foodstuffs such as tea and jams and the introduction of relief into people's lives would affect people's existences and impact on their social and political accommodations. As W. Hamish Fraser pointed out, 'the British people were able to concern themselves with more than mere subsistence: they had a surplus to spend on more and better food, on a wider range of clothing, on more elaborate furnishing for their homes and on a greater variety of leisure pursuits'.[26] Contemporary witnesses noted how local newspapers 'reach a manufacturing population of greater wealth than could be found in any area of equal size in any other part of the world'. Cooperative journalist James Haslam even suggested in 1910 that 'an income between £6 and £7 a week for some Lancashire families was common'.[27] Though probably an exaggerated point the average weekly wage of all male weavers in Lancashire in 1906 was 25s 4d.[28] In contrast, Maud Pember Reeves investigation of workers in Lambeth London, which started in 1909, revealed that 'a huge number of workers, including shop assistants, fish fryers, seamstresses and factory hands, earning wages between 18s and 30s per week, struggled to feed and clothe their families'.[29] Though weavers were labelled sometimes as 'wage aristocrats', what is of significance for this study is the amount of differentiation within the industry itself. Grinders average earnings in 1906 was 29s 3d

[25] Alan Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton Operatives and Work, 1900-1950* (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2003), p.73.
[26] W. Hamish Fraser, *The Coming of the Mass Market 1850-1914* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1981), p. IX
[27] Ibid., p. 44
[28] Joseph White, *The Limits of Trade Union Militancy* (London, Greenwood Press, 1978), p. 33
[29] Selina Todd, *The Rise and Fall of the Working Class, 1910-2010*, (London: John Murray Publishers, 2014), p. 2

and tapesizers in Blackburn 47s 3d in the same year. That Burnley women weavers would earn an average of 24s 11d and Leigh women weavers 17s 7d reflects more the prevalent divisions amongst the weavers than a class-conscious oneness. As Trevor Griffiths noted, though a mutual support system was evident in the mill towns, often through neighbourliness and cooperative societies, breakdowns in industrial relations pointed up the limited nature of mutual agreements and Cooperative officials were aware that the movements fortunes were driven primarily by quarterly dividend payments. As contemporary Bolton socialist Allen Clarke noted, 'such trends were proof of the selfishness and materialism at the heart of working-class culture'.[30]

Another example of Lancashire socialisation, the process of accepting and understanding societal norms and expectations, was organized religion and spontaneous events. Church gatherings could include festivals, choirs and Sunday schools. In Lancashire, Whitsun week was viewed with great anticipation, as it could be the only time of the year when a young girl could get a new dress. Reported on annually and at length, Whitsuntide witnessed quite ninety per cent of the looms in the borough at a standstill; extra train excursions to Blackpool; and school processions that regarded 'walking day as dear as the morn on which Father Christmas and Santa Claus leave their loving token'.[31] On other occasions, novel events in the calendar would be sufficient to give rise to a 'holiday'. In Rochdale, some local residents remembered Queen Victoria's funeral in 1901 primarily because the workers got half a day free from work with pay.[32] Other workers noted that holidays were viewed with mixed feelings because of the lack of pay. Percy Ternert remembered being taken to Manchester by his dad to celebrate the relief of Mafeking in May 1900 and nearly all workers recalled their first trip to Blackpool.[33] It requires little imagination to understand how the drudgery of long hard labour in a sweaty mill could be made more bearable by the attraction of seeing the sea for the first time, eating ice-cream, or riding on the donkeys with all the fun and frolics of the fairground.

[30] Trevor Griffiths, *The Lancashire Working-Classes 1880-1930* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2001), p. 326
[31] *Burnley Express*, 6 June 1908, 9 May 1891 and *Nelson and Colne Times*, 11 June 1897
[32] Living History Workshop, Rochdale Local Archive, Do You Remember, ref BO2, p.54.
[33] Ibid., ref BO2, p.58.

The heart of the industrial sector of Lancashire would overflow with commercial leisure opportunities In Manchester in the early 1850s, it was estimated that the music saloons were attracting some 25,000 working mill hands per week at 2d per ticket.[34] Horse racing would move to an enclosed track at Aintree in 1839.[35] The National Anti-Gambling League (NAGL) formed in 1890, notably with an office in Manchester, in direct response to the perceived growing problem of betting. Elsewhere, a surfeit of sporting magazines were born: the *Sporting Chronicle* (1871), the *Cyclist* (1879), The *Pigeon Fancier's Guide and Homing World* (1866) and the boxer's, *Mirror of Life* (1886).[36] The dog sport of coursing had its roots in the North West and the Waterloo Cup was run in Altcar.[37] It was also no coincidence that when the Football League was established in 1888, that out of the twelve founder clubs six came from Lancashire. Each pastime had its own particular allure and each would capture and distract workers away from the socialist message spread by the SDF. The importance of the expansion of entertainment was that it became part of mill town culture. 'The development of league cricket in Lancashire, charging at the gate, paying professionals and attracting large and enthusiastic crowds on Saturday afternoons, clearly ran ahead of developments in other parts of industrial England'.[38] It was a newfound belief and workers' expected 'that everyone had a right to the enjoyment of leisure'.[39] The cultural space that workers occupied was changing. Now social relations would include the annual exodus to Blackpool and the new world ahead. Walter Greenwood described Blackpool's distinctive appeal as 'a product of unconscious revolt'.[40] Into this melting pot of 'unconscious' entertainment and distraction the SDF activists would have to compete for attention.

[34] Ibid., p.167.
[35] Mark Clapson, *A Bit of a Flutter* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p.110.
[36] Stephen G. Jones*, Sport, Politics and the Working-Class* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p.21.
[37] Clapson, *A Bit of*, p.139.
[38] John K. Walton, 'The Origins of Working-Class Spectator Sport: Lancashire, England, 1870-1914', *Social History*, Vol. 17, 2012, p. 136
[39] James Walvin, *Leisure and Society* (London: Longman Press, 1978), pp.76-78.
[40] Fowler*, Lancashire Cotton*, p.64.

Socialist opposition to the new social climate was well documented. 'Spokesmen for the working-class…. Lament the displacement of political energy into apolitical and hence conservative leisure'.[41] The response of the SDF was limited to three approaches. The party criticised the workers for making the wrong choices, they provided alternative entertainment in spaces where the majority of workers were not present and they placed their main political strategy on education. H. W. Hobart's assessment of workers' use of their leisure time was typical of the SDF response. Hobart asserted that 'the greater portion of leisure time of the average British workman is spent in the public-house', and he went on to conclude that 'the average British workman is as big a fool with his leisure as with everything else he has'.[42] The problem was two-fold. Some SDF activists could not understand a workers' culture of immediate satisfaction and many workers never wished or desired the same ends as the SDF activists. Soon many activists were entrapped in a narrow discourse of critique that never had the intellectual capacity to realize its own predicament. The SDF were prisoners of their own intellectual culture, which rarely understood the need to bet, drink or play, could be given priority over a utopian egalitarianism. Not without some justification, Mark Bevir contended that 'the growth of commercial leisure pursuits, all widened the gulf between aspirations of the socialists and the daily concerns and activities of the working-class'.[43]

In contrast to this, the alternative was to pay a few precious pennies a week to discuss a 'possible' better future. The SDF branches clearly had strong competition. Much was determined by money, or the lack of it, and an awareness of this strong factor is surprisingly seldom documented or attended to by executive histories of the SDF. Local SDF branches exhibited a similar disregard. In 1900 in Nelson, a combined weekly weavers' household, of working husband and wife, could acquire an income range from 35s to £2. 'A husband and wife would live frugally and tried to save for a long

[41] Cunnigham, *Leisure*, p.184.
[42] *Justice,* 18 May 1895.
[43] Mar Bevir, 'The Labour Church Movement 1891-1902', *Journal of British Studies*, 38:2, April 1999, p.234.

week-end at Blackpool'.[44] At Nelson Hippodrome, the lowest admission price was 4d. A loaf of white bread in Blackburn was 2d and milk was 3d per qt.[45] In contrast, SDF membership fees, 3d a week in Bolton 1896, would not have been trivial for the majority of workers on 20 shillings a week.[46] Branches revealed no long-term payment plans or examples of financial leniency for poor workers. However, once again the local informs where generalisations of SDF history are incomplete. Activists like Dan Irving and Joseph Shufflebotham implemented their own versions of socialism. In Burnley, Irving showed a better understanding of the social status of the workers. Irving demanded that local council meetings times be moved so that workers could attend after work. Irving also had a more direct understanding of his constituents, noting that 'the fear of poverty, nay, the dread of absolute starvation holds the worker bound…for is not half a loaf better than no bread'.[47] In Bolton, Shufflebotham was both fearless and passionate: 'he was a militant socialist who regarded members of the Establishment with great suspicion. This led him to accuse the rev. T. A. Clarke, Chairman of the Building and Sites Committee, of the Bolton School Board, of improper dealings', an action that would result in Shufflebotham being accused of slander.[48] To what extent SDF activists replicated Irving and Shufflebotham would no doubt affect the image and social relations of the individual SDF branches and their success in each unique mill town environment.

The cotton industry was reaching its zenith at the end of our period of study, simultaneously on the sports fields of Lancashire few could compare with the red rose county. Average Lancashire county cricket attendances for the county team led the field regularly and was the top figure 1889-1894. In rugby league, the Lancashire Cup was the prominent rugby competition with a crowd of 20,000 surpassing the national cup competition in 1912.[49] During the twenty-five years between the founding of the

[44] W Bennett, '*The History of Marsden and Nelson'* (Nelson: Coulton and Co, 1957), p. 216
[45] Census of England and Wales 1911, Preliminary report with tables of the Population, p. 96
[46] Bolton SDF Minutes, Bolton Local History Archives, Ref FDS 1/1, 17 November 1896.
[47] *The Socialist*, 1 June 1894.
[48] Denis Pye, 'Who Was Joseph Shufflebotham', Workers Educational Association, 2004, BRN 1404265, pp. 32-33
[49] Wray Vamplew, *Pay Up and Play The Game* (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1988), pp.60 & 66.

Football League and the onset of the First World War 'attendance at matches in the textile towns rocketed'.[50] At a local level sport often combined with socialization and charity and the Burnley Victoria Cup contributed over £3,680 to the Victoria Hospital from 1919-1927.[51] Fowler summarized the period for weavers, 'rising living standards and rising expectations … it seemed that the world was at Lancashire's feet'.[52] Simultaneously, the failure of the 1912 weavers' lock out would see *Justice* acknowledge that workers ' control over their own lives, through possession of the means of life by the community at large, seems to enthuse the workers not at all'.[53] Growth and expectation was the antithesis of an environment that Marxist theory required to raise class-consciousness and even in dispute the Lancashire weavers showed little propensity to revolt. It would appear that an SDF failing was not confined to the one or two simplistic interpretations of national histories but because of a particular social environment that was rapidly changing and carrying with it a host of new opportunities, desires and distractions.

The Distractions

As Jeffrey Hill outlined, if we are to fully understand the complexity of the impact of leisure and socialisation on politics and people, one has to acknowledge that these pastimes are like other parts of popular culture 'a window through which British society can be viewed, and an important medium in the construction of the view'.[54] Wray Vamplew pointed out that the key significance of leisure in general and football in particular was sociability, a feature of social interaction, which the SDF had difficulty replicating. Vamplew also noted that 'deprived of power and esteem at work, he [the worker] found a surrogate identity as a member of a large group….sport allowed the

[50] Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton*, p.66.
[51] C. E. Sutcliffe, *History of the Lancashire Football Association* (Blackburn: Geo. Toulin and Sons,1928), p.277.
[52] Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton*, p.73.
[53] *Justice*, 27 January, 1912
[54] Hill, *Sport, Leisure and Culture,* p. 91

working man openly to challenge authority'.[55] Leisure during this period could provide the workers with a fatalistic culture of consolation that detracted from political radicalism or engagement. As McKibbin presciently pointed out, 'men could wish to be elected to either a trades council or secretary of a pigeon-breeding society: one had to be comparatively unusual to do both'.[56] However, in juxtaposition to general histories, the local reveals that this SDF difficulty would be complicated and require further investigation.

The particular Lancashire context affected SDF fortunes. Distractions in the mill towns would be extensive and varied. Robert Poole outlined the complexity of analysing workers' responses to leisure in his investigation of popular Bolton leisure. Poole noted that new leisure institutions of the late nineteenth century adapted themselves to the existing popular taste of the workers. Football's 'rational athleticism' gave way to partisanship; music halls' respectable facade could never prevent the bawdy shenanigans of performers and artists. The Club and Institute Union's (CIU) initial high regard for sobriety and decent recreation soon gave way to beer by demand. Poole concluded by highlighting the custom of the mock Mayor of Ringley, wherein the man who drank the most was elected mock Mayor in the village. This tradition providing insight into the co-existence of contrasting workers' values of riotousness and respectability and that 'for the working-class, the pub still dominated leisure time'.[57]

In Burnley, Victoria Theatre opened on 14 September 1886. Admission prices were 4s for the dress circle centre, 3s for the sides, 2s for the stalls, 1s for the pit and 6d for the gallery (Gods). An average power loom weaver's earnings were approximately 24s a week, and so admission prices were not cheap, which suggests that different entertainment facilities focused on different audiences. By 1894, the Empire had opened and before 1900 the Palace had joined them, demonstrating the growing

[55] Vamplew, *Pay Up and Play,* p.267.
[56] Ross McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.15.
[57] Robert Poole, *Popular Leisure and the Music Hall in 19th Century Bolton* (Lancaster: Centre for North West Regional Studies, 1982), p.79.

popularity of the music hall at the turn of the century.[58] Up the road in Nelson, no less fun was to be had. The Palace Hippodrome's entertainment card for November 1911 provided trapeze, dogs and a Palascope.[59] Music halls had an extensive tradition and had been in existence in Lancashire since the early nineteenth century. For many workers, the music halls and singing saloons were a direct source of entertainment wherein one could forget about the daily scourge of repetitive labouring torment. Music Hall theatres in Burnley, like the Victoria and the Empire could be regularly recorded as 'full in every part' in 1900 or 'crowded at both shows on Monday evening' in 1904.[60] In Bolton alone there were 60 establishments licensed for musical entertainment in 1880, and no wonder that one beerhouse was aptly named 'Help Me Make It Through This World'.[61] Mill town workers 'neither had nor needed the sort of sense of mission in life to which the gospel of middle-class self-improvement appealed'.[62] This very same long-term sense of mission was what the SDF based their entreaties on. As Rohan McWilliam noted in outlining the fears of the early socialists 'the road to revolution did not start at the stage door of the Gaiety Theatre'.[63] It is not difficult to imagine how the SDF came all too often second to the flamboyant escapism of the music hall.

In addition to theatres and music halls, at the beginning of the twentieth century Burnley had an annual fair that dated back to 1294. At the turn of the century, the fair was located on Parker Lane at the cattle market site, and it promised magic and delight. Roundabout owners, or 'the rising masters' as they were known, accompanied the many various stalls and attractions. These included, Tiny Tim 23 inches high and 24 pounds in weight (Harold Ryatt of Stockport), Corkwell's Shooting Gallery with ping-pong balls held up by jets of water, and a big favourite, Bert Hughe's Boxing Pavillion,

[58] Leslie Chapples, Burnley Historical Society Bulletin, Burnley and District Historical Society, Burnley Library, 'The Vic 1886-1955', no. 23 (2005).
[59] *Nelson Leader*, 24 November 1911.
[60] *Burnley Express*, 18 April 1900 and 22 June 1904
[61] Robert Poole, *Popular Leisure and the Music Hall in 19th Century Bolton*, p.72
[62] Ibid.,p.17.
[63] Rohan McWilliam, *London's West End* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 307

whereupon anyone lasting three rounds could win himself £5.[64] In parallel to the fair, the minutes of the town council recorded the drive towards corporation initiatives. 'Mr Alderman Thornber and Mr James Thornber be authorized to purchase 30 sets of bowls for the bowling green at Queens park'.[65] A little later, we can read of shelters to be built and six men to be engaged as park keepers at the 'pleasure gardens' in Burnley. The Chairman of the Parks Committee, Alderman Keighley, informed the committee that 'Burnley Temperance Prize Brass Band had offered their services fortnightly on Thursday evenings on a similar cash volunteer basis'.[66] In addition to commercial music and beer, the town council was providing games and music in the parks. It was entertainment of a less rowdy variety but a quiet walk in a flowered garden, accompanied by a temperance tune from God, delivered a message of peace and serenity.

An aspect of consumerism and betting particular to Lancashire was the football pools. James Hilton described it as 'one of the most momentous happenings of our time'.[67] Originating in the sporting media and the provision of a 'fixed-odds' reward system, the coupons were distributed by agents in the streets, around the mills and workplaces and outside football grounds 'to such an extent that bookmakers were 'doing a roaring trade' amongst the artisans of the great engineering works in Openshaw and the dwellers in colliery districts like Wigan and Atherton'.[68] Along with the growing interest in 'The Pools' came the earliest pools expert flysheet entitled, *The Incomparable Football Forecasting System*. It was first published in 1879 and its author was W. J. Duckworth, who hailed from 46 Church Street, Padiham, just outside Burnley.[69] A Lancashire statistician of the time, Ainslie J. Robertson, was convinced that 'by 1907 at least a quarter of a million coupons were on the market every week during the football

[64] William Pearce, Burnley and District Historical Society, Vol 12, 1993/94, Burnley Pleasure Fair, pp.22-24.
[65] Town Hall and Parks Sub-Committee Minutes, Burnley, CBBu/96/1/, 14 March 1892-22 July 1895.
[66] Parks and Recreation Committee Minutes, Lancashire Archive, CBBU/39/1/, 1894-1904.
[67] Mc Kibbin, *The Ideologies of Class*, p.105.
[68] Clapson, *A Bit of a Flutter*, p.164.
[69] Ibid., p.178.

season in Merseyside alone'.[70] The habit was not just restricted to men. 'One in three women workers did the pools' and 'women numbered about one in five of everyone sending in a coupon'.[71] Filling in the pools became woven into the pattern of communal recreation. Mark Clapson claimed it became an occurrence 'as casually and uncritically as a trip to Goodison Park or an evening in the corner pub'.[72] Gambling had become an accepted part of ordinary life. It was a weekly opportunity to pit one's wits against the system and escape the drudgery of mill life beyond one's wildest dreams. Intellectuals, socialists and religious ministers held a different opinion. On several occasions, Burnley ministers and anti-gambling activists railed against betting. A former 'tipster', Mr 'Dock' Sharp addressed a series of meetings in Nelson and spoke of 'the horse racing evil'.[73] Six years later, Reverend Appleyard was no less concerned. Labelling football betting a 'public craze', he argued that drastic steps were needed to 'check an evil which is ruining many young men and women, chiefly, it would appear, of the working-classes'.[74] The traditional guardians of the workers were clearly convinced that ruination was at hand, a loss no doubt that would preclude political activity. Gambling, diverted workers' attention, occasionally provided them with succour, and even sometimes assisted in developing self-esteem. Another developing social relationship of the workers, which most certainly would not promote socialism.

In the mill towns, a way of life based on immediacy reinforced the appeal of gambling. Many workers lived often in a debt-credit cycle where the simple shopping of foodstuffs could be acquired at the corner shop on 'the slab', to be repaid again on payday. This 'money goes around comes around' workers' culture was termed 'teeming and ladling'.[75] It was enhanced by a psychological resistance to saving, which was associated with an unknown future. This was reinforced by the fact that gambling could acquire a status equivalent to a skill. The act often offered to many 'the only possibility of making a decision, of a choice between alternatives, in a life otherwise

[70] Ibid., p.164.
[71] Ibid., p.174.
[72] Ibid.,, p.176.
[73] *Burnley Gazette*, 27 July 1907.
[74] *Burnley Express*, 12 March 1913.
[75] McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class*, p.118.

prescribed in every detail to poverty and necessity'.[76] Gambling was therefore of significance because it could play a part in people's economic lives. When Methodist president of the football league, Charles H. Sutcliffe, initiated moves to withhold match fixtures from the media, the restriction became known as 'the Pools War'. The decision to withhold the publication of football fixtures to defeat the pools 'flung all into a storm of fury'.[77] As Otto Newman argued, 'for the working-classes, in certain economic circumstances, gambling makes sense'.[78] Though pools betting did not necessarily prevent SDF success directly, we can make two observations. First, that many believed that sport and gambling were undermining socialism. C.F.G Masterman noted in his critique of the sporting press at the time that sport and gambling were 'directing the thoughts of the multitude away from consideration of any rational or serious universe'.[79] Second, any gains that were made by workers in their feats of wagering would not assist the SDF. Naturally, winners through chance or skill were direct proof that escape was possible and winners merely encouraged more participation. As Clapson noted, 'there were no readers of the *Morning Star* or *Daily Worker* in the winners' cohort'.[80] Importantly, in a workers' world where income and work could be unpredictable, it is not difficult to understand why many opted for the simple gratification of winning a bet. 'Working men and women 'learned' – more from the school of life than at their mothers' knees – that there was not much to prudence and the future would look after itself'.[81]

Another workers' gambling impasse was to face the editorial board of *The Daily Citizen* in 1913. Less than a year after its launch, the editorial board of the *Daily Citizen* was faced with a 'betting dilemma'. Should they not report on popular sports betting and risk losing readership or provide this coverage against many socialists' individual principles. The editorship voted five to three to include betting tips in their coverage. John Bruce Glasier noted that 'the editor, manager and circulation agent have declared

[76] Ibid., p.124.
[77] Clapson, *A Bit of a Flutter*, p.170.
[78] McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class*, p.116.
[79] Clapson, *A Bit of a Flutter*, p.32.
[80] Ibid., p.177.
[81] McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class*, p.115.

that without betting news the paper cannot go. All the directors are personally against betting, but several have for some time been insisting that it is necessary to yield to this foible of the working class'.[82] Socialists appeared to only have two responses; they rebuked the workers for being seduced by commercialism, or, like the *Daily Citizen*, they gave in. Importantly and conclusively, 'little attempt was made to probe any deeper, to understand why educationalist strategies had failed or how the leisure industry was more capable than they (socialists) were of appealing to particular working-class needs'.[83] As Chris Waters has noted, even in the SDF stronghold of Burnley there was little in the way of an alternative strategy and much in the way of dwindling support. 'Burnley was one of many towns that offered socialists a grim picture of working-class – even a skilled working-class – slowly repudiating the values they cherished'.[84]

Horse racing was another strong distraction which had a long tradition in Lancashire. The Grand National had started at Aintree as early as 1843. The number of courses holding meetings grew from 56 in 1848 to 82 by 1870 and eventually courses became enclosed as owners sought to make a profit.[85] As early as 1892, *The New Review* could claim that it did not hesitate 'to affirm that no game, no gambling, no sport, no amusement is the occasion of so much reading as racing'.[86] Jockeys were famous and became legends: 'national figures whose only rivals, if even they were, were the Queen and Mr. Gladstone'.[87] By the turn of the century 'a little flutter developed as the symbolic act around which a new sense of tradition had developed – the sporting right to bet'.[88] Dog coursing had its major arena in Lancashire too and greyhound racing in an enclosed arena would develop later in the 1920s. As Downes argued, 'the short intensive thrill of five or more thirty-second races at nearby tracks was an

[82] Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture*, p.182.
[83] Ibid.,p.182.
[84] Ibid., p.178.
[85] Clapson, *A Bit of a Flutter*, p.111.
[86] *The New Review,* June 1892.
[87] Ross McKibbin, 'Working-Class Gambling in Britain 1880-1939', *Past and Present*, No. 82 (February 1979), p.174.
[88] Clapson, *A Bit of a Flutter*, p.133.

exciting diversion for many working-class people'.[89] People who gave their attention and time to a flutter on a regular basis highlights two important factors: that another workers' pastime or social relations space existed that the SDF were alienated from, and that a winning pay out was hardly like to encourage unrest. Although SDF men were not adverse totally to entertainment, Dan Irving applied for a music and dance licence at St James Hall in Burnley in 1902, the historical evidence is markedly absent of SDF participation in the growing sporting and commercial environment.[90] When evidence does appear it is all too often estranging and does not take account of the needs and desires of the ordinary working man, as one SDF supporter exclaimed 'the truth is that sport, like every other thing, is demoralised and damned by capitalism'.[91]

Pigeon racing was another pastime that provided a route to money and was another distraction from the SDF. By 1906 the hobby was thriving in Lancashire, 23,982 birds were sent to the 1907 Up-North Combine race in 1907 and a year earlier the Nelson and District Homing Society had twenty members, nearly half of whom were from the mills. In the North East Lancashire Homing Federation there was huge interest. Burnley was divided into four different flying clubs, or 'ends', and a race from Gloucester to Burnley and District saw several hundred 'fanciers' send at least 1,191 birds south to race.[92] Sweepstakes at pigeon races were the norm and even food and drink were commonly staked on races. At a short-distance race in Burnley in April 1907, 'M. Blackburn won first and third prizes, amounting to £4 for first and 10s for third'.[93] When a full week's wage was approximately 20 shillings, this was a large return. In addition, pigeon races 'invariably organized themselves into clubs that met in public houses'.[94] Workers' participation with the 'poor man's racehorse' filled social desires for sociability, status and financial rewards. At its core pigeon racing provided participants with acceptable competitiveness 'to lives otherwise circumscribed both by

[89] Ibid., p.144.
[90] *Burnley Gazette*, 22 February 1902.
[91] Jones, *Sport, Politics and the Working Class*, p. 29
[92] *Burnley Express*, 21 August 1907.
[93] *Burnley Express*, 3 April 1907.
[94] Martin Johnes, 'Pigeon Racing and Working-Class Culture in Britain, 1870-1950', *Cultural and Social History*, 4:3, 2007, p.372.

the requirements of increasingly mechanized work routines'.[95] The time and energy given over to the birds and the knowledge of the sport would leave little time for politics, 'such knowledge [of birds was] all the more significant when placed alongside wider high levels of working-class ignorance on current affairs'.[96] Not surprisingly, employers preferred to 'have men who could drink, fly pigeons, and who took dogs out with a string' rather than ones who were knowledgeable about the state of the industry.[97] Pigeon racing, through its sense of self-worth and sociability, would encourage contentment and acceptance and provide pleasure, distinctive from politics. As Martin Johnes summarised, pigeon racing, like all forms of leisure, was to some extent political and the pigeons, like so many other distractions, provided the workers 'with a fatalistic culture of consolation that detracted from political radicalism'[98].

Drawing its ideological strength from the improvement societies and the nonconformist churches the various strands of the labour movement were generally opposed to gambling. J. R. MacDonald stated that 'gambling is a disease which spreads downwards to the industrious poor from the idle rich. In its common form, betting on horse-racing, it is the only way in which the outcast plebians can be joined with their betters in a bond of Masonary'.[99] As with several areas of SDF ideology, there was a demarcation between national interpretations of an issue and local readings. At the national level, the SDF and other socialist groupings approached betting from a rather theoretical position. Belfort Bax was quick to note that 'leisure not religion was the new opiate for the masses'.[100] The SDF opposed betting for two general reasons: first, they thought that the disproportion between the effort required to bet and the possible reward obtained was gross; second, they believed that betting encouraged a spurious democracy based on good fortune, which in itself was an irrational concept. In contrast, McKibbin noted that the growth of betting at the turn of the century

[95] Johnes, 'Pigeon Racing', Footnote 54, p.368.
[96] Ibid., p.369.
[97] Ibid., p.376.
[98] Ibid., p. 376
[99] McKibbin, 'Working-Class Gambling', p.173.
[100] Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture*, p. 28.

provided more subtle avenues of growth. For him gambling was 'the most successful example of working-class self-help in the modern era'.[101] McKibbin also pointed out that the betting industry employed approximately 100,000 people and did indeed help some workers, 'they have now a bank account and enjoy the luxury of clean linen and water-tight boots'.[102] Far from being an aspect of Lancashire life that was interpreted as morally negative or leading workers to economic ruin, some workers benefitted from the existence of the betting industry for their livelihoods.

However, at the local level, the SDF response to leisure and gambling was also diverse. Reverend T. A. Leonard was a mill town SDF activist in Nelson and Colne. Leonard, like many other local SDF leaders, prioritized his own personal agenda and highlights how the interaction between activist and environment shaped agendas. Leonard's specific form of social change was characterised by him linking his religious belief with social reform and by emphasising the respectable and rational in entertainment. As a member of Colne SDF, Leonard was a 'popular speaker at Labour Church meetings, often speaking on 'Darkest England'.[103] In the spring of 1891, Leonard decided to approach the Young Men's Guild from within his own congregation. The Guild had been planning to travel to the popular commercial seaside resort of Blackpool. Leonard was alarmed at the thoughtless spending of money and the unhealthy overcrowding in lodging houses. Instead, Leonard persuaded the young men to follow him on a rambling holiday in Ambleside. Shortly thereafter, enthused by the previous holiday, the group formed the Nelson Working Men's Holiday Association. Members were meant to pay 2s 6d on joining and then 1s per week until the holiday. By 1893, Leonard had formed the Co-operative Holiday Association (CHA) and by 1894, the Reverend was offering healthy rural vacations for a princely sum of 31s 6d.[104] The average weavers' weekly wage in Burnley in 1900 was 21s 8d.[105] Seebohm Rowntree calculated

[101] Ibid., p.172.
[102] Ibid., p.172.
[103] Leonard Smith, *Religion and the Rise of Labour* (Keele: Ryburn Publishing, 1993), p.135.
[104] Jill Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel, Selina Cooper 1864-1946 (London: Virago Press, 1984),* p.81.
[105] Gordon Armstrong, 'In Burnley, 1900, and the Absence of a Public Library', *Library History*, 19:3, 2003, p. 214

that year, that a working family required 26s a week to avoid chronic want. 'A large proportion of the British working class remained in a precarious economic situation even when fully employed and could be plunged into desperate straits with the loss of even a few days earnings'.[106] Ten years later in 1911, the average weekly housing rent in Rochdale took nearly a quarter of workers' weekly wages, ranging from 3s 6d to 4s 9d. In Blackburn, in 1905, a loaf of bread was 2d, eggs were 14 a shilling, milk was 3d a quart and coal was 9d per hundredweight.[107] Nevertheless, the relative financial status of cotton weavers compared to other workers was seen as robust. Contemporaries like *Cotton Factory Times* founder John Andrew and journalist James Haslam saw Lancashire cotton operatives as 'one of the most prosperous sections of the working class'.[108] The Lancastrian mill town culture contained simultaneously workers who were wrestling with poverty and others who were relatively more comfortable with some disposable income. Leonard's approach to educating and improving the lifestyles of workers certainly had its moral supporters but the 800 people who participated in the CHA vacations in its inaugural year compares slight to the 600,000 visitors who made the journey to Blackpool in one season in 1871.[109]

As Hill had argued, understanding workers' culture and wishing to change that culture were two very separate issues that not many SDF members could comprehend. Leonard would be no exception to that. Five years after Leonard had left Colne, Selina Cooper and her husband Robert met the Reverend Leonard. On this occasion, Leonard asked the Coopers to run one of his holiday centres in the remote village of Keld on the Yorkshire moors of Swaledale. The summer of 1899 would prove an arduous task for the Coopers who after only three months would return to Brierfield and 'normal' life. Not for the first time, life and financial necessity had stepped in to interrupt the flow of socialist aspiration. Swaledale illustrates one of the problems faced by Leonard and the SDF in Lancashire: its strategies often did not attract workers, but appealed to the middle classes instead. The autograph book at Keld was signed by people from

[106] Sally Mitchell, *Victorian Britain. An Encyclopedia* (Oxford: Routledge, 1988), Bernard Cook, p. 839
[107] Census of Engalnd and Wales. 1911. Population Tables. pp. 393 and 96
[108] Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton*, p. 43
[109] Cunningham, *Leisure*, p. 162

Lancashire and Yorkshire and their eloquent maxims were from Wordsworth, Longfellow and Tennyson. Guests like Dr T. Lewis Paton, high master at Manchester Grammar School, were educated people with an intellectual commitment.[110] Leonard's rational holiday experiments 'quickly lost their working class following and became largely middle class in composition'.[111]

Leonard's SDF socialism tells three things. First and foremost, Leonard's approach not only contributed to the evolution of a provincial mill town counter-culture, it was a specific part of that culture in which religious values informed social convention, a linking of religious belief with social and municipal reform particular to north east Lancashire. Liddington noted that Leonard was 'this key figure in the development of local socialist culture'[112]. Second, the weekly contributions to the CHA of 1s per week was a substantial amount of money for ordinary workers, the average weekly salary for a skilled four-loom weaver in 1906 ranged from 21s 6d to 25s 11d.[113] In the long term, this weekly outlay could be difficult to maintain in the light of competition from friendly societies, union subs and the cooperative. This financial consideration was a significant aspect SDF activists often overlooked and a possible factor as to why few workers participated in Leonard's venture. Third, Leonard's endeavours carried a message of 'rational reform'. Pastimes were purposeful, serious, sober and based on self-improvement. Yet, many workers were content to choose more casual forms of leisure, which were self-indulgent, short-term and infused with alcohol.

Leonard's particular socialist culture was religious in spirit, local in origin, non-revolutionary and free from SDF Executive interference. Similar in content to the drive for 'rational recreation' it was often rejected by the majority of workers. The Mechanics Institutes had 100 institutes in 1868 and approximately 24,000 members in

[110]Liddington, *Life and Times*, p.86.
[111] David Prynn, 'The Clarion Clubs, Rambling and the Holiday Associations in Britain since the 1890s', *Journal of Contemporary History,* no 11, 1976, p.74.
[112] Liddington, *Life and Times*, p.67.
[113] Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton*, p. 24

Lancashire.[114] The combined towns of this study comprised of almost 400,000 people. Chris Waters noted 'Leonard was often disappointed that the workers he hoped to wean from Blackpool never came'.[115] Like many other SDF local innovations, though full of energy and promise, constructive past-times could not compete with the growing succession of accepted workers' entertainments from gambling to drinking. Leonard's alternative came, quite literally, at a cost and workers were not interested, could not afford the entrance fee, or preferred to spend their hard-earned money on more hedonistic allurements. The gulf between Leonard and his target audience was expressed succinctly by a Blackpool 'cheap tripper' in a mischievous poem: 'I dote on the tramway electric. On niggers and banjos I dote. But this 'cultchaw' quite drives me dyspeptic. It's worse than an hour in a boat. Begone to your ancient Parnassus. To Oxford ye lecturers flee. Leave this place for the lads and the lasses. Leave Blackpool I tell you, to me!'[116] Often workers' language expressed without doubt that their desire to be improved was negligible and 'cultchaw' was unwanted.

Other SDF activists reveal more gradations and complications. SDF member Samuel Mortimer Holden from Oswaldtwistle, Lancashire, launched the *British Socialist News* in 1899, played cricket for Accrington and was part of the committee to honour Dan Irving in 1902.[117] John Widdup of Burnley SDF also played for his local cricket team in 1888.[118] Clearly, a few socialists found it possible to merge their socialist view with their sporting talent. On the other hand, Joseph Toole of the South Salford SDF branch, related an example of a totally different set of SDF activists. The secretary of the South Salford SDF branch, who had received a tip-off from a milkman, persuaded the committee to place the entire funds of the branch, twenty-five shillings, on a bet on a horse in the Manchester Cup, needless to add without success.[119] Sometimes rank and file members of the SDF were more interested in the immediate than a utopian future

[114] John Hemming, 'The Mechanics' Institutes in the Lancashire and Yorkshire Textile Districts from 1850', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 9:1, 1977, p. 18
[115] Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Culture*, p. 76
[116] *Blackpool Gazette*, 26 July 1889.
[117] *Burnley Pioneer*, No. 78, October 1902.
[118] *Burnley Express*, 5 May 1888
[119] Joseph Toole, *Fighting Through Life* (London: Rich & Cowan Ltd, 1935), p.86.

too. Nationally, the party focused on criticizing the workers but SDF tactics at the local level could be quite different. Caught unawares by the fast-moving social and leisure changes all around them, no alternative strategy to reach and convert workers' hearts and minds was provided beyond the belief in education. 'It was another way in which they were divorced from the everyday existence of the class they wished to lead'.[120] Though gambling was generally frowned upon, Lancastrian SDF branches provide instances of exception and participation, in a county where a quarter of a million pools coupons were on the market every week in Merseyside alone in 1907 and where John Moores founded Littlewoods.[121]

Even in the hotly contested rounds of municipal elections, leisure squeezed itself into people's lives and into politics. During the municipal election in Rochdale in 1906, an issue surrounding the construction of bowling greens became an unexpected political pawn, with politicians promising a varying degree of commitment to the construction of this much sought after entertainment. The Catholic candidate in the Wardleworth West ward, Tierney, said that he was in favour of the construction of municipal bowling greens, but Liberal Councillor Smith wished to point out that any construction should not be a burden to the ratepayers. Alcock, the Labour Party candidate in Wardleworth East ward, advocated the establishment of bowling greens in various parts of the town. In Alcock's opinion 'there was a conspiracy to 'best' the working classes on the Bowling Green question'.[122] The importance of the bowling green debate is not significant in terms of who won, but in its focus as an event of vital centrality to the people of the town and its local politicians. Such issues could win votes and power for the SDF more than theoretical positions on economics or imperial affairs. The political party that could recognize this crux of localism and marshal the local forces of support would be most successful at the first political staging post of development, the local town council. Local politics existed under very different circumstances to national politics and issues directly at hand were the issues that could make or break a local political party. A historiographical focus on national

[120] McKibbin, 'Working-Class Gambling', p.176.
[121] Clapson, *A Bit of a Flutter,* p. 164
[122] *Rochdale Observer*, 31 October 1906.

interpretation and the executive overlooks the impact of bowling greens, one of several kernels of this study.

A final aspect of the leisure boom particular to Lancashire was football. As Tony Mason has suggested, football in particular created another sort of loyalty and consciousness that was readily available and easy to grasp. A parochial town identity, battled for every Saturday, would provide thrills and excited conversation, which was a potent diversion. The Lancashire Football Association could boast of one hundred and fourteen clubs in 1886.[123] In Lancashire alone, the attendance figures at English First Division League football matches soared from 602,000 in 1888/89 to 8,778,000 in 1913/14, an average per match increase from 4,600 to 23,100.[124] Football simply became one of those things which working men did. Even in the midst of a miners' strike in 1912, 'the strikers made the most of their free time then, playing football'.[125] Football spurned a completely new journalism called the 'Saturday Football Special' and it was a pastime that workers risked being sacked for. 329 absent workers at a mill in Bolton in 1908 risked prosecution when they left work and chose to watch a FA Cup replay match.[126] It was also the one distraction that enticed workers to actually save. In Sheffield, as many as 10,000 workers were prepared to pay subscriptions to 'Final Clubs'.[127] Football, decisively promoted a sense of belonging which town councils and socialists could not compete with, 'a growing identification with place…such identities and loyalties might have inhibited the emergence of other kinds of loyalties'.[128] Most vitally, football's belonging was to become an intrinsic part of mill town culture and was another social forum that the SDF were rarely a part of. It was one more example of SDF exclusion from a feature of workers' social relationships. This repetitive marginalization would not assist the party in converting workers to the socialist cause.

[123] Tony Mason, *Association Football and English Society, 1863-1915* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980), p.31.
[124] Vamplew, *Pay Up and Play*, p.63.
[125] Ian Frederick Scott, 'The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Federation 1900-1914' (unpublished PhD, University of York, 1977), p.274.
[126] Mason, *Association Football*, p.239.
[127] Ibid., p.147.
[128] Ibid., p.235.

The SDF and socialists in general were anything but entertained. At the turn of the century, ILP stalwart Bruce Glazier noted that 'cycling, football, and other forms of personal recreation have cost us the zealous services of many admirable propagandists'.[129] In 1904, an article in the *Labour Leader* by 'Gavroche' was scathing, stating that football was 'absorbing, from year's end to year's end, the minds of the great mass of workers, rendering them mentally incapable of understanding their own needs and rights. We are in danger of producing a race of workers who can only obey their masters and think football'.[130] Two years later, Labour MP Mr. A. Richardson, was no less tolerant, complaining that

> when you find 20,000 men spending a shilling out of their wages of 30 shilling to watch a football match – not to play, mind you – but to watch a mere spectacular display, and then go home and buy an evening newspaper and spend another hour in reading the self-same match over again; then on Sunday morning to see young folks discussing the match they have seen on Saturday afternoon, I think it is time to say to young men, 'Halt!!!.[131]

Yet, in contrast to this critique, we can locate local inconsistencies. The SDF played a football match against the local Clarion team in March 1898, winning 5-0 and a local SDF football team existed in Northampton, where they won the Junior League 1897-98.[132] The personal writings of contemporary socialist, E. R. Hartley, illustrated the influence of sport: 'the greatest man in England today is not the greatest scholar, doctor, or evangelist, but the footballer – be he never so vulgar'.[133] These examples of SDF and socialist responses to sport re-emphasize the importance of the local perspective. The local reminds us that socialist activists were driven by a multitude of local circumstances and that, despite executive complaints and directives, politics in towns and districts was governed more by individuals and immediate issues at hand

[129] Ibid., p.236.
[130] Ibid., p.236.
[131] *The Monthly Review*, October 1906.
[132] Mason, *Association Football*, p.236.
[133] E. R. Hartley, Personal Papers 1878-1982, West Yorkshire Archive, Bradford, 11D85/5/20, 'Rounds With The Socialists', p.61.

rather than by theoretical ideologies. .[134] Unfortunately, for the socialist cause, even some of its own supporters were showing unwelcome inclinations. 'In 1909 meetings in the West Riding had to be cancelled because socialists preferred to attend local football matches'.[135] Contemporary socialist, Brougham Villiers, summarized sport in Lancashire conceding that 'in the workshops of Lancashire and Yorkshire towns on Monday mornings, the discussions were about the latest ILP meeting – after the topic of Saturday's football match had been exhausted'.[136]

As Wray Vamplew noted, the 'one thing that mattered to most working men in late Victorian England was how they spent their time when they were not at work'.[137] Football and sport was a forum that local SDF branches simply could not compete with. Focused on free speech, education and municipalisation, the local SDF activists created a dialogue that was restricted by their own point in history. SDF branches of Lancashire had not necessarily failed, but had been surpassed because of social change. The goalposts had indeed been moved. As Mason summarized, 'football may have contributed to an easing of class tensions and a diminution of a consciousness of class on the part of working men, while encouraging the idea among working men that they were part of a group with similar experiences'.[138] Sociability, the interaction of workers outside the mills in specific mediums, was a key part of workers' free time and political parties who engaged in this sociability were more likely to increase their acceptance and popularity. A. J. Balfour attended a football match at Manchester City in September 1900 to attract support.[139] Asquith engrossed 7,000 spectators at an address at the ice-rink in Burnley in December 1910.[140] Little evidence has come to light suggesting that the local branches of the SDF did the same and this reinforces the point that the party, at all levels, rarely recognised the importance of sport and leisure

[134] Jones, *Sport Politics and the Working Class*, p.28.
[135] Ibid., p.28.
[136] Villiers, *The Socialist Movement*, p.173.
[137] Vamplew, *Pay up and Play*, p.11.
[138] Mason, *Association Football*, p.242.
[139] Mason, *Association Football*, p.119.
[140] P. F. Clarke, *Lancashire and The New Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p.135.

to workers and therein overlooked the opportunity to create a stronger bond with the workers.

The relevance of football to the SDF is four-fold. First, the huge appeal of the game was another distraction, nurturing a different focus of loyalty that few other ideologies could compete with. Second, elements of mill town culture were reflected and reinforced in football and a socialization process was extant that provided a sense of identity and made the relationship with town team more important than politics and work. This relationship was reproduced on the terraces and on the pitch in acts of 'hard but fair' play and a desire to belong and win. When members of the SDF unleashed diatribes against football supporters, such as 'if grown men find gratification in kicking a ball, let them kick; but what rational pleasure can there be in looking on', they were excluding the party from a vital aspect of socialisation. [141] However, what is central to my argument is that this type of general labelling only serves to perpetuate the general account. In reality, there were SDF men who did bridge the gap but they were far and few between. Third, as Vamplew noted, football provided an identity, a possibility to challenge authority and a possibility to win 'football has brought them to a happier life … it has helped them to a taste of the extreme pleasure of forgetting themselves'.[142] Football in the mill towns presented a challenge that the SDF could never have foreseen. Some SDF branches supplied an occasional sportsman, like Samuel Mortimer Holden of Oswaldtwistle and Northampton SDF appear the only local branch to establish a SDF football side. However, many socialists may well have been plagued by the same issue as Frank Owen, the central character in Robert Tressell's *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. Owen's colleagues were convinced that 'there must be something wrong with a man who takes no interest in racing or football and was always talking a lot about religion and politics'.[143] The unending line of sporting distractions, the huge pull of football and a mill town culture that was often separated from, and importantly by, many activists of the SDF, spawned a cultural environment

[141] Stephen Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain 1883-1896', *History Workshop Journal*, no 4, (1977), p.44.
[142] Vamplew, *Pay Up and Play*, p.268.
[143] Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Culture*, p.160.

that the local branches of the SDF could far too often not bridge. As McKibbin noted, 'politics, religion, the fates of empires and governments, the interest of life and death itself must all yield to the supreme fascination and excitement of football'.[144]

Drink and Socialisation

The historical tradition of drink and its relationship with many sporting and leisure activities suggests its impact on mill town environments cannot be overlooked in relation to the many nuanced aspects that affected SDF branch progress. Unlike the simplified explanations of general histories, our Lancashire SDF branches reveal that the process of understanding branches lies not so much in dogmatic and intransigent interpretations but more in the processes of socialisation. Though frowned upon by temperance members, drink appears as an ingrained part of a mill town lifestyle and accepted as a workingman's due if not taken to excess. One of several 'rights' for workers, drink was seen as socially respectable if consumed in the correct context. Nevertheless, Seebohm Rowntree claimed that one-sixth of working-class earnings were spent on drink. Charles Booth would claim that the figure was closer to one-quarter.[145] Contemporary social commentator T.S. Peppin claimed that the average working man spent 10.5d a week on beer.[146] Drink became a precious moment when men could socialize and play, and crucially for many it was part of a workers' lifestyle. A. E. Dingle asserted that 'increased purchasing power was likely to be squandered on drink…the situation was exacerbated in mill and mining towns, with their solidly working-class populations…[giving] rise to a fixed frame of convention to which all tended to conform and which was hostile to improvement'.[147] That drink could affect politics was never in doubt. At the 1895 general election, in which the Liberals had aired their temperance support, the Conservative victory saw 388 out of 410 successful

[144] McKibbin*, The Ideologies of the Working Class*, p.148.
[145] A. E. Dingle, 'Drink and Working-Class Living Standards in Britain, 1870-1914', *The Economic History Review*, 25:4, 1972, p.612.
[146] T.S. Peppin, *Club Land of the Toiler* (London:Forgotten Books Publishing, 2015), p.47.
[147] Dingle, 'Drink and Working-Class', p.616.

candidates favouring the drink trade. Few could dare to overlook the importance of drink and that 'the temperance issue had contributed to the defeat of the Liberal Party in the 1895 election'.[148] Like in so many other workers' communities throughout England in the nineteenth century 'to abandon drink was to abandon society itself'.[149]

The significance of drink and socialisation for the SDF was that it was both a source of national/local party tension and a practical and theoretical dilemma. First, though music halls were often utilized for SDF mass gatherings, how could activists get their socialist message across to the workers? Considering the workers had a very limited amount of free time, SDF activists had an urgency to meet the workers and ensure that their written propaganda reached its intended audience. Documentation tells us that SDF activity centred around branch meetings, public meetings on market squares, and via the distribution of socialist literature through local newspapers. Theoretically, the SDF executive had taken a position on alcohol that favoured some form of state or municipal control on the sale. In contrast, local mill town branches would sometimes endorse alcohol and sometimes not. However, that leisure and drink were an inseparable pair and would have a profound influence on society is reflected in the development of organisations that sprung up to both promote and discourage drink.

Drink in Lancashire encouraged the development of two contradictory organisations, the temperance movement, which agitated to banish drink, and the Club and Institute Union (CIU), which grew and established working men's clubs in nearly every town in Lancashire. Both organisations would compete for workers' attention, temperance directly on the market square and pulpit and the CIU indirectly over a pint. The temperance movement had its roots in Lancashire. Joseph Livesey, a self-educated handloom weaver, and seven other men, signed a total abstinence pledge in Preston in 1832. Temperance societies developed in Blackburn and Manchester and others grew

[148] Lilian Lewis Shiman, *Crusade Against Drink in Victorian England* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), p.229.
[149] James Nicholls, *The Politics of Alcohol* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p.100.

up in Keighley and Salford in 1861.[150] The issue of drink is yet another example of the complicated and contradictory nature of mill town culture. Just as some weavers were affluent some were less affluent. Likewise, some weavers drank and some did not. Pending the context, drink could be interpreted as an acceptable Friday night reward for a hard week's work or an unnecessary evil that could lead to violence and domestic deprivation. Drink as an aspect of Lancastrian culture would be particularly influential in certain locations. 'The diocese of Manchester was particularly active on the temperance issue and Liverpool had a church teetotal society from as early as 1837'.[151] Yet from the very beginning the abstinence movement was split between 'moderationists' and 'teetotallers' and was fraught with an array of different strategies to eradicate drink. Nevertheless, the anti-drink movement continued to grab attention and its millenarian rhetoric 'struck a large chord with large numbers of working people … because it suggested that … social transformation were in their hands', a salvation that may well have enticed possible SDF recruits.[152] Several periodicals appeared preaching the message of abstention. The *British Temperance Advocate, Weekly Record, Onward* and *Alliance News* would all spread an alternative message of salvation in competition to the SDF.[153] *Onward, The Organ of the Lancashire and Cheshire Band,* specifically printed for children, had a circulation of 7000 in 1866. By 1895 it and the other temperance papers claimed a regular circulation of 500,000 copies, 'it had clearly achieved influence'.[154]

A little later, another organisation, the Salvation Army, would organise its own attack on drink and adopt a new confrontational strategy. The response of the SDF was, as ever, varied. Hyndman was critical, inferring that the Army was an anti-socialist dodge and 'a supplement to philanthropy'.[155] However, local SDF branches, such as South Salford, 'were not afraid of direct charity work as part of their presence in a locality'

[150] Shiman, *Crusade Against Drink*, pp.11&32.
[151] Ibid., p. 48
[152] Nicholls, *The Politics of Alcohol*, p.103.
[153] Shiman, *Crusade Against Drink*, pp. 156-157.
[154] Annmarie McAllister, 'Onward: how a Regional Temperance Magazine for Children Survived and Flourished in the Victorian Marketplace', *Victorian Periodical Review*, 48:1, 2015, pp. 50 and 59
[155] Victor Bailey, 'In Darkest England and the Way Out, The Salvation Army, Social Reform and the Labour Movement, 1885-1910'*, International Review of Social History*, 29:2, 1984, p.157.

and would work in tandem with the Army.[156] The Salvation Army took their redemption into the heart of workers' communities, saving the workers by making assaults on popular pubs. This direct appeal was resisted. 'In 1882 alone, 643 Salvation Army members were attacked by protesting crowds'.[157] It was a tactic for urban space, which previous forms of middle-class rational recreation had shirked away from. These attacks on the Salvation Army activists were performed by groups of workers who were known as 'skeleton armies'. In Salford, the Salvation Army would challenge residents not to enter public houses. Robert Roberts recalled how 'working men saw it as their 'duty' to push through the Salvation Army ranks with a jug of beer in each hand'.[158] Just as in the areas of weavers' wages, drink was a complex issue with no one SDF approach or solution with responses often being decided by the activist on the ground.

The federal and individual nature of the SDF saw its members turn their attention to alcohol with predictably diverse results. H. Russell Smart attempted to address the socialist and SDF position in a 1d pamphlet entitled 'Socialism and Drink' in 1890. He argued that 'to no class of reformers are the evil effects of the drink traffic more apparent than to the socialists…drink is one of the greatest ramparts of capitalism'.[159] Smart went on to challenge the temperance advocates' position that drink caused poverty and inverted the position, asserting poverty in fact caused drink. The same argument was repeated in print in Burnley in 1895 when Irving challenged the temperance reformers to a debate.[160] The local conflict between the SDF and the temperance movement would not just be limited to debate. In the spring of 1895, the *Burnley Express* reported that 'an amusing incident occurred on the Burnley Market ground on Sunday night'. Temperance reformers and socialists had inadvertently come to the market ground at the same time to hold their public meetings. The result was an open conflict in which the weapons of battle were songs. The temperance supporters

[156] Yeo, 'A New Life', p.39.
[157] Brad Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship* and Working-Class Men in Britain, 1850-1945 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p.36.
[158] Ibid., p.38.
[159] H. Russell Smart, 'Socialism and Drink', Labour Press Manchester, 59 Tib Street, 1890, p.3.
[160] *Burnley Express*, 8 June 1895.

sang hymns and the SDF members countered with the Marseillaise.[161] The battle for hearts and minds continued in Colne. At a meeting of the United Kingdom Alliance in October 1895, Mrs Slack appealed to her audience that 'whether Liberal or Tory they should go in for electing good and pure men'.[162] Ten years later a similar encounter took place. Nelson SDF member Selina Cooper addressed a sparsely attended meeting on Burnley Market in 1906, 'perhaps accounted for by a counter-attraction some yards away in the shape of a temperance meeting, which had an audience at least five times as great as that which listened to Mrs. Cooper'.[163] The SDF and the Salvation Army were often in direct competition. 'Working-class individuals, becoming aware….expressed and formalized this new status by joining the Salvation Army as much as by attaching themselves to the labour movement'.[164]

Established in 1862, the CIU signified 'leisure as a battle ground' and reinforced the importance of respectability for mill town workers.[165] Within this arena, Henry Solly established an organisation with specific aims to convince workers' leaders of the stability of capitalism.[166] The CIU in many ways was anathema to socialism and voiced its opinions through a range of newspapers such as the *Club and Institute Journal*, *Club World* and *Club Life.* The political message was one of conciliation and acceptance. Richard Price noted how the CIU saw the solution to class hatred 'to persuade the working men of the justice of the present social and economic arrangements…The Club movement expressed the same panaceas but in a more muted and subtle form'.[167] From 1870 onwards, the clubs began to sell alcohol and 'the proportion of affiliated clubs which were teetotal fell from 19% in 1890 to 3% by 1913'.[168] Provision of alcohol

[161] *Burnley Express*, 15 May 1895.
[162] *Burnley Express*, 23 October 1895.
[163] *Burnley Express*, 29 August 1906.
[164] Bailey, 'In Darkest England', p.141.
[165] T. G. Ashplant, 'The Working Men's Club and Institute Union and the Independent Labour Party' (unpublished PhD, University of Sussex, 1983), p.50.
[166] Richard N. Price, 'The Working Men's Club Movement and Victorian Reform Ideology', *Victorian Studies*, 15:2, December 1971, p.143.
[167] Ibid., p.140.
[168] Ashplant, 'The Working Men's Club and Institute', p.77.

was undoubtedly a key facet of the clubs' long-term success. By the First World War, the organisation could claim as many as 1,500 clubs and 500,000 male members.[169]

From a local perspective, the clubs were very popular in mill town Lancashire. Nonconformist opposition may have had strongholds such as Nelson but Lancashire mill town culture in general liked to have a pint. In 1902 there were 141 registered clubs in the county, the largest number outside of London, and by 1914, 242 clubs were established.[170] Lancashire mill towns possessed an abundance of clubs because the area had over fifty years of industrialization, which 'built a vast infrastructure of working-class organisations, to which the clubs, as late-comers, had to fit themselves'.[171] Importantly, the clubs were often not political, but built and developed from a workers' desire to be independent, 'building their own culture … meant building the institute in which these activities could be embodied'.[172] From the start, the clubs worked within a framework of formal acceptance that mirrored mill town culture. Clubs implemented a clear social policy of inclusion and exclusion, membership often requiring a formal application and a club sponsor.[173] Inside these rules club norms and traditions developed: membership was conferred on members' sons as soon as they turned twenty one; the oldest club members were given special status and called the 'Number 1'; women were often excluded from membership or certain areas of the club; and the ritual of having a minute's silence would be enacted when members died. All these behaviour traits were implicit institutionalised mechanisms of cultural transmission. Most importantly these 'rules' reflected the social law-abiding environment outside of the club walls.[174] One feature detected on a reoccurring basis was the drive for respectability. Entertainment and drink were permitted, though always with an eye to avoiding excess, and respectability was sought at all times. Individuals who broke the rules or who were repeatedly drunk

[169] Ibid., p.104.
[170] Ibid., p.682.
[171] Ibid.,p.318.
[172] Ibid., 463
[173] Ruth Louise Cherrington, 'The Development of Working Men's Clubs: A Case Study of Implicit Cultural Policy', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 15:2, 2009, p.190.
[174] Ibid., p.196.

were 'named and shamed' and clubs allowing after-hours drinking or unlicensed gambling faced expulsion. 'In essence the WMC's (Working Men's Clubs) took upon themselves the role of guardians of respectable working-class culture'.[175]

The drive for respectability would greatly hamper the progress of the local SDF activists. As Elizabeth Roberts asserted, workers' shared some fundamental beliefs: 'loving one's neighbour, justice and the work ethic'.[176] In anthropological terms, this policing of cultural boundaries is termed 'framed liminality' and represents the need for order in society ensured through rituals, repetition and language. Joyce noted of workers' communities that 'sex, age and social status were minutely mapped out by a series of cultural boundary markers, among them sayings, jokes and stories'.[177] What was not respectable could include swearing at home, poor cleanliness and sexual discussion.[178] Joyce also noted that what was evident in late Victorian society was a 'culture of control rooted in the exigencies of poverty and work … at the centre of a variety of expressions of which class was only one'.[179] Lancastrian contemporaries added colour to this interpretation. Robert Roberts described Salford's system of workers' social caste as more striking than class. 'This caste system stood natural complete and inviolate because it answered to people's needs … the constant attempt to handle the daily realities of poverty by bringing order and meaning to life'.[180] Allen Clarke, SDF parliamentary candidate for Rochdale in 1906, described how a tripartite system of class existed in Bolton. He portrayed workers as resigned: 'they have no true idea of life … they believe they are bound to work'.[181] Yet, respectability would mainly be characterized in moderation and law-abiding features. Mill town customs and values incorporated hard work, fair play and being a good neighbour and these mores and this lifestyle would work against the SDF activists who were regularly portrayed as

[175] Ibid., p.193.
[176] Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place, An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Press, 1984), p.6.
[177] Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People, Industrial England and the Question of Class 1848-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.155.
[178] Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, pp.14-17.
[179] Joyce, *Visions of the People*, p.156.
[180] Robert Roberts, *The Classic Slum, Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971), pp.15-16.
[181] Joyce, *Visions of the People*, p.157.

alien and unreasonably belligerent. As Annie Kenney noted, 'the strange thing with the public was that they did not like to see or read about militancy'.[182] The workers' drive towards respectability and non-militancy would be at stark odds with an SDF who nationally were portrayed by the mass media as foreign and unreasonable, and who locally were sentenced to prison or wanted to reduce weavers' incomes. In the end, perhaps the best that we can assert about the CIU is that 'the defensive, incorporated character of so many labour movement institutions has to be understood for what it was – a way of surviving in a hostile environment'.[183] Historians have concluded that the CIU was the 'largest and most successful of all the efforts through which Victorian England set out to ensure an assimilated and acquiescent proletariat'.[184] Though this interpretation may not be entirely incorrect, it does supplement the argument that 'drink' distracted the workers from more serious contemplations and it reinforces the argument that SDF success or failure was a much more complex and nuanced process than previously acknowledged, especially in Lancashire.

A large body of Methodists in Nelson also highlights the importance of geographical location to the question of both religion and drink and provides the study with a different form of a sociometric relationship. Within the particular Nelson environment, the local SDF branch would be faced with a specific type of challenge. In 1890, the town had two Anglican and one Catholic church, but sixteen nonconformist chapels. The Primitive Methodists had 1,276 members, 46 lay ministers and 4,700 Sunday School scholars on roll.[185] Historians have argued that life in the chapels 'prepared the ground for the acceptance of one kind of socialism rather than another, a kind in which there was little place for a radical and violent class consciousness'.[186] Though perhaps an exaggeration, a very long history of nonconformist Methodism and temperance in Nelson, affecting and competing in electoral circumstances as a supporter of the ILP,

[182] Annie Kenney, *Memories of a Militant* (London: Edward and Arnold Publishers, 1924), p.147.
[183] Ashplant, 'The Working Men's Club and Institute', p.529.
[184] Price, 'The Working Men's Club Movement', p.147.
[185] Smith, Ironically, the Nelson ILP may well have come into existence partly through the inspiration of the earlier SDF, as we know that SDF members, Ernest Johnson and Waltar Parrat attended the inaugural ILP conference, which suggests that Salem members responded to an SDF initiative, *Religion*, p.130.
[186] Ibid., p.18.

informs that Methodism and teetotalism was at least one decisive factor that made the ILP more popular than the SDF. The strength and tradition of the Methodists in Nelson was epitomized by one particular church, Salem Independent Methodist Church. Salem demonstrated the specific effects that a religious movement could have on a town. Built in 1852, the chapel was deeply involved in day-to-day activities, its members had founded the local cooperative society in 1860 and the chapel ran a Sunday school, a choir and glee clubs and the church was deeply committed to temperance. At some point during 1892, some of the younger men of the chapel became interested in the local Mutual Improvement Society and shortly thereafter the ILP. An eyewitness reported how

> the ILP sprang out of Salem Chapel…Jack Robinson…originally, as a young man, was Secretary of the Young Men's Class at Salem. And they were getting many socialist speakers coming, and listening to them, and Jack thought he might as well be in the ILP. So he dropped the Salem side. It wasn't what they required. It wasn't supplying the needs what they wanted, wasn't religion. And they thought the ILP and socialism were – or would do – and they left.[187]

Processes of socialisation, just like active branches of the SDF, could be unique in every mill town.

The fact that many prominent ILP leaders, such as West Riding born Phillip Snowden, were teetotalers would have attracted nonconformist voters and supporters to the Nelson ILP. 'There is no doubt that the ideological rift on the issue of drink shaped the struggle between the contending socialisms of the SDF and the ILP and determined the chronology of its emergence as a political force'.[188] Selina Cooper's first electoral battle in the town was in fact against Sarah Thomas, a Liberal Methodist who stood on a platform of temperance.[189] In addition, two successful Nelson MPs of this period were also renowned teetotallers: 'David Shackleton was a Rechabite and his successor Albert Smith was a long-standing member of Nelson Welcome Lodge, a flourishing

[187] Ibid., p.133.
[188] Ibid., p.133.
[189] Liddington, *The Life and Times*, p.110.

teetotal organisation'.[190] With quite some justification, local historian, Firth, went so far as to argue that 'the fact that the SDF was not Christian and teetotal may have been a decisive factor in the failure of the party in Nelson'.[191] Nelson and Salem chapel outlines that religion could indeed be an influential factor in SDF development, however, in this study it appears as a singular example. Events in each mill town reinforces the position that to understand the SDF better requires more individual and local studies.

Though religious language and rhetoric was predominant in all socialist groups, the general historical interpretation has been to label the SDF as atheist. Evidence from national executive actions support this position. Harry Quelch passed a London Trades Council resolution in November 1905, 'dissociating itself from the effort being made to bring about an alliance between the Free Church and the Labour movements'.[192] Yet, once again, the local provides us with more complexity. The *Pioneer* referred to Dan Irving as 'the apostle' prior to the 1902 municipal election.[193] Joseph Toole referred to his beginnings with the SDF in his autobiography as 'the conversion'.[194] This rhetoric, though, did not prevent other local SDF interpretations and Lancastrian inconsistencies persisted. George Penlington of Rochdale SDF was a Wesleyan Methodist.[195] John Sparling of the Burnley branch of the SDF, regularly attended Hollingreaves Congregational Church.[196] Religion affected and motivated SDF members in different ways and at different times and no one religious stance adhered across the party. This further undermines the idea that the SDF was one cohesive political group.

Nevertheless, SDF branches grappled with the problems of leisure and drink. The Bolton SDF and ILP arranged multiple entertainment events in an attempt to attract

[190] Roger Smalley, *Dissent*, (Nelson: Nelson ILP Land Society, 2018), p.50.
[191] Paul Firth, 'Socialism and the origins of the Labour Party in Nelson 1890-1906', (unpublished MA, University of Manchester, 1975), p.35.
[192] Smith, *Religion*, p.99.
[193] *The Burnley Pioneer*, October 1902.
[194] Toole, *Fighting Through Life*, p.74.
[195] *Rochdale Labour News*, November 1896
[196] Christine Hook, Great Grand-daughter of SDF Burnley member John Widdup, Personal Papers, p.3.

members and keep their branches energetic: 'Draughts match with West Ward ILP', 'that we arrange a waggonette picnic to Rivington', and 'that a dart board be purchased as soon as possible'.[197] Yet, the consumption of alcohol would create difficulties for the local socialists and sometimes impeded their effectiveness. Throughout 1896, there was a disagreement within the Bolton SDF about alcohol. First, it was decided that 'no one is to be served with drink that is in an intoxicated condition'.[198] Then one month later, a resolution to close the bar was lost by Moss, which was followed by a warning from Secretary Leyland that Rowlands would be expelled if acting drunk and disorderly again. In September, Rowlands was expelled for drunkenness. A large debate ensued in November of that year:

> a general and protracted discussion took place regarding the future management of the bar and though suggestions were tendered in abundance the business was practically at a standstill … nominations for the Bar Committee were not to be obtained, ultimately comrade Steward moved urgency for a resolution to abolish the bar, this was carried, as was the resolution – that we sell off the stock and abolish the bar'.[199]

However, by December 'it was resolved 17 votes to 7 to reopen the bar'.[200] Within one month, Rowlands was again expelled for drunkenness. The ILP branch in Bolton had fewer problems, a situation aided by a system of cautious monitoring which 'resolved that a quarter barrel of beer be brought up as an experiment – that no member under 20 be allowed more than 2 glasses a day'.[201] Individual situations and individual branches would and could work effectively with alcohol and some would and could find it more difficult and destabilizing. Effective SDF political organisation, as in the case of Bolton, was hindered by alcohol. In Dan Irving's teetotal Burnley branch, it would never have been an issue. Each local branch of the SDF therefore worked out its own solution or response, highlighting the importance of the local context and the

[197] SDF Minute Books. FDS/1/1/ June 1896.
[198] Ibid., FDS/1/1/, 30 June 1896.
[199] Ibid., 10 November, 1896.
[200] Ibid., 6 December 1896.
[201] Bolton ILP Minutes FDS/1/2/ 10/, December, 1896.

complexity of the situation in mill towns, which would result in a variety of SDF island positions.

Provincial socialists could be teetotalers like Irving, or drinkers like Seth Sagar: 'that same night I, along with other members of the committee, went to the SDF club at Ann Street and over a few drinks discussed the appeal'.[202] Importantly, at the local level, branches were divided on drink. Bolton SDF changed their opinions often and Irving wanted to implement a form of municipalisation with his 'People's Palaces'. In this sense, there was no one SDF position on the question of drink and local leaders would dominate in deciding the party's stance. Personalities were just as persuasive in this domain too. Evangelist Frank Smith was important in bringing the Salvation Army and socialism closer together and he was at the forefront in mirroring SDF activities in his 'contribution to the defence of the freedom to meet.'[203] Like so many others, Frank Smith would eventually become a Labour MP, at Nuneaton in 1929.[204] When Irving was asked in his electoral campaign of 1906 what his position was regarding closing pubs on Sunday, he answered he believed in 'municipalities and the State between them owning and controlling the whole of the liquor traffic'.[205] This was an oblique reply to an issue the party never got to grips with. Three miles up the road in Nelson, lecturing at the Salem Methodist chapel, Irving may well have taken a much more stern approach to the same question.

Mill town Lancashire was in effect the 'world's first working-class commercial sporting culture'.[206] The significance of the specific Lancastrian circumstances created an environment that was dominated by innovations in popular sport and consumerism. Its values embraced the furtherance of local pride and the development of competing social networks. At times, these networks dominated many workers' preoccupations.

[202] Seth Sagar, 'Memoirs', *North West Labour History Bulletin*, Vol 20, 2009, Part II, p.39.
[203] Bailey, 'In Darkest England', p.147.
[204] Ibid., p.159.
[205] *Accrington Observer*, 13 January 1906.
[206] Walton, 'The Origins of Working-Class Spectator Sport', p 135

At 3.00pm on Saturday in winter at Turf Moor or Burnden Park for instance. On Saturday afternoons in summer watching the Lancashire Cricket League, Burnley and Nelson clubs regularly attracted crowds of 6,000. In 1873 and 1907, crown green bowling at Blackpool would host the Talbot and Waterloo cups respectively.[207] In turn, these events and examples of socialisation remote from politics, demonstrates that the nature of SDF politics was not tied strictly to an orthodoxy but was in fact dependent upon local personalities and their singular opinion about issues of sport and drink. Importantly, sport and drink for many workers was a part of their socialization process and those outside that process were much less likely to gain influence. That Smart or Irving never engaged with workers when they watched as spectators or drank, reveals their alternative, anchored in a socialist future, kept them all too often at a distance. More than any dogmatic ideology, this local SDF exclusion from workers' forums of socialisation would be one of several keys to SDF failure.

The Organisations Compete

One of the many difficulties that the SDF encountered, both within and without, was the proliferation of different types and interpretations of socialism. These contending groups would provide alternatives to the SDF branches and influence and colour workers' perceptions to the many different types of socialisms, not always in favour of the SDF. The Labour Church movement was one example of an organisation that would compete and hamper the SDF on its road to socialism and characterises the interchangeable nature of early socialism and the fluidity that existed between groups. Importantly, the initiative was short-lived and the prime benefactor, initially ethical socialism of the ILP, would become the Labour Party. During the Labour Church's existence, over 100 churches were formed but the peak of active branches was just over 50 in 1895. Thereafter the movement began to deteriorate, with 40 churches in 1897, 30 in 1898 and just 20 by 1902. Religious activities and structures gave an acceptable and conventional ethical force to working-class politics. As McKibbin has

[207] Ibid., pp. 127/134

argued, though, religion would also throw 'working-class churchgoers into the company of the middle classes and encouraged an egalitarian bonhomie', revealing yet another deviation from a socialist revolution and the complex and interwoven nature of the SDF environment.[208]

The origins of the Labour Churches can be connected to a crisis in Victorian faith, which in turn led to an increasing immanentist view of religion and God. In this specific case, a conviction that the means of realizing God's Kingdom was through the labour movement. When John Trevor left his Unitarian pulpit in Manchester in 1891, stating that 'God (was) in the Labour Movement', it would not be long before the Reverend B. Harker affiliated his Congregational mission in Bolton.[209] Early statements and writings from the movement indicated its strategies. Spiritual fellowship rather than economic reforms defined the socialist ideal, 'sociality, the spirit which demands the socialization of the necessaries of human life, is but individuality fuller grown'.[210] The main political strategy was simply to make more socialists through conversion to the socialist creed. The 'Statement of Principles' printed in the first number of the *Labour Prophet* in January 1892, ought to have been an anathema for SDF members. Point two reading that 'the religion of the Labour Movement is not a Class Religion', and point three noting that 'the religion of the Labour Movement is not sectarian or dogmatic'.[211] SDF national ideology based on class conflict would not sit comfortably with Trevor's principles. The establishment of the ILP in Bradford in 1893 accompanied by a Labour Church mass of some 5,000 people indicates that the Labour Church movement was more closely aligned to Keir Hardie than to Hyndman.[212] This was significant, as the ethical appeal of the Labour Church would lie closer to the Methodist ILP than the atheistic/agnostic SDF. Local studies show that this type of general labelling of

[208] McKibbin, 'Why was There No Marxism', p.308.
[209] K. S. Inglis, 'The Labour Church Movement', *International Review of Social History*, 3:3, December 1958, p.446.
[210] Mark Bevir, 'The Labour Church Movement 1891-1902', *Journal of British Studies*, 38:2, April 1999, p.226.
[211] Ibid., p.227.
[212] Inglis, 'The Labour Church', p.445.

allegiances and political parties is misleading and a better understanding of SDF branch cooperation and accuracy is only found at the local level.

'The Labour Church thrived in the industrial centres of nonconformity. In the first four months alone of 1894, four new churches sprang up in South Lancashire alone.'[213] Other churches followed and were established in Lancashire; in Accrington, Blackburn, Bolton, Darwen, Manchester and Salford.[214] These establishments were significant enough; Oldham's average attendance was 300.[215] Lancashire's particular context was revealing its penchant for religion and its inclination to follow a more ethical socialist code. This tendency was borne out through the ILP and the movement's popular speakers. The most popular speakers were Ben Tillett, Phillip Snowden, Keir Hardie, Enid Stacey and Katherine Conway. This ILP influence would have been a concern for the SDF as the party was strong in many mill towns and would not relish yet another institution stealing away support. Robert Moore hinted at SDF concerns and argued that the effect of Methodist influences on workers' communities was to inhibit the development of class-consciousness, 'preparing the ground for the acceptance of one kind of socialism rather than another'.[216]

However, recruits to the Labour Churches came from all denominations and political backgrounds and attracted many types and strains of socialists. ILP member Fred Brocklehurst (Bolton, 1895) and SDF member Sam Hobson (Rochdale, 1906) were two prominent parliamentary recruits. Hobson, who was originally a Quaker, supported the Labour Church movement for more everyday reasons. 'Some of us supported the Labour Church for practical reasons. Everywhere there were loud complaints from Liberals and Conservatives that we were taking an unfair advantage in holding our meetings on Sunday….But when we founded our own Church, dragging in an enticing

[213] Bevir, 'The Labour Church', p.230.
[214] *The Labour Annual For 1895*, ed. by Joseph Edwards, Labour Press society Ltd 1895, p.43.
[215] Bevir, 'The Labour Church', p.228.
[216] Smith, *Religion*, p.18.

clause from the Lord 's Prayer as our basis, that particular criticism was silenced'.[217] The Labour Church also attracted Alice Foley's sister, Cissy. Foley provides us with some insight. 'She [Cissy] was also allied with the Suffragettes and, more disturbing still, a zestful member of the local Labour Church….the present circle was a group of sedate young ladies from shops and offices, all sedulously imbibing socialistic ethics….on Sunday afternoons members of the Labour Church were reading and debating William Morris's *Dreams of John Ball*".[218] This woven interloping of socialist groupings and membership highlights the flux of local socialist movement and is a key to understanding the role of the SDF within it. Just as local branches could interpret doctrine, so too could local individuals interpret what mattered to them, and thus resulted a multitude of socialist interpretations. The proclivity to interpret socialist politics of the late nineteenth century into neatly defined labour groupings overlooks the ingrained complexity of the reality of mill town politics.

From a national perspective, the SDF position is too often simplified. When an attempt was made in 1905 to forge an alliance between the labour movement and the Free Churches, Harry Quelch spoke with executive authority via the London Trades Council. Dissociating himself from the effort being made to bring about an alliance between the Free Church and the labour movements, Quelch moved that the council

> further expresses its disgust at the methods by which the promoters of such an alliance are seeking to attain their end, and refuses to believe that secret conferences between leaders of political nonconformity and carefully selected representatives of Labour can be a step towards the social and political emancipation of the workers.[219]

In reality, at branch level, cooperation and support between the Labour Churches and the SDF would depend upon the personalities of SDF and Labour Church leaders and the issues that the Labour Churches took up. Some activities the SDF may well have participated in and some not. In Manchester, where the Hulme branch of the SDF was

[217] S. G. Hobson, *Pilgrim to the Left,* (London: Edward Arnold & Co, 1938), p.41.
[218] Foley, *A Bolton Childhood*, p.46.
[219] Smith, *Religion*, p.99.

most active: 'Manchester Church organized a shelter for the homeless and a Cinderella Club for underprivileged children in the Deansgate area of the city'.[220] As Mark Bevir also noted, allegiances of churches reflected the politics of the areas where they were situated, for example 'Bolton Church had close ties with the local SDF'.[221]

SDF participation in the Labour Church movement could and would be disorganized and random. However, to understand British socialism and the SDF, we need to be aware of the competition in socialist thought between different institutions. During 1893 and 1894, the Labour Church in Manchester church was holding three services a day on Sundays.[222] John Trevor claimed at the height of the movement that 'I go few places where I am not met with the remark: 'it was Nunquam [Blatchford] converted me to socialism''.[223] At a practical level, the Labour Church raised ethical and moral questions and the church would steal and distract socialist recruits. Its relevance to the SDF lies in three areas. First, the Lancastrian environment consisted of a very particular religious stimulus. The mill towns had a long-time formed Christian base and models of correct socialisation would include basic Christian values. Often labelled as 'ethical socialism' men like Trevor and the many nonconformist groupings, especially in north east Lancashire, brought another dimension to the development of socialism in the county. In general, a Christian ILP juxtaposed to an aetheist SDF would have created severe difficulties for the followers of Hyndman. In reality, such simplistic explanations overlook the complexities of local histories and individuals. Second, the Labour Church was another organisational initiative established to assist the workers, which did not arise out of working-class experience. It arose from a well-meaning Unitarian minister and was redundant within just a few years. Third, and ironically, as Jacqueline Turner noted, the Labour Church's enduring contribution was 'its role as a propaganda tool and the establishment of a social platform for the message of the early Labour

[220] Bevir, 'The Labour Church', p.232.
[221] Ibid., p.233.
[222] Ibid., p.228.
[223] Inglis, 'The Labour Church', p.455.

Party'.[224] In this interpretation, the Labour Church and the early ILP were helping to develop the direct political competitor to the SDF in the future.

Offshoots from the Labour Church, the Socialist Sunday Schools (SSS) movement and the Cinderella Clubs, developed in Lancashire too in the early 1890s. These groupings have also often been portrayed in a simple and general manner. The SSS would compete with the SDF and provide further evidence of the complex process of workers' socialisation. At a meeting in Manchester in 1893, with Trevor and Blatchford in attendance, a resolution was drawn which stated that 'we propose to establish a Cinderella Sunday school not to force into the children Labour Church ideas but, by means of interesting lessons on various subjects, to develop their thinking and imaginative faculties so that they may grow'.[225] This open-ended aim left exposed the possibility for more interpretations and reflected the position of ethical socialism, wherein the primary social objective was education and not class war. However, reality could often be very different to the simplistic terms and groupings of general histories.

The *Young Socialist*, first published in January 1901, claimed five schools existed in Lancashire. General histories assert that there was a distinct split between the Lancastrians and the 'rest'. The Lancastrians, with a good deal of input from Manchester, wished to foster in children an understanding of the social conditions around them. This focus on environmental conditions supposedly reflected the strength of the SDF in the county. Hyde SSS in Manchester was an outspoken branch of Lancastrians, who implemented an elaborate curriculum closer to SDF values. 'This included tales of bygone reformers, the relationship between capitalism and poor social conditions and the aim of demonstrating that socialism was an inevitable stage in the evolution of society'.[226] In contrast, the other Unions hoped to awaken emotions in young people. The 'Declaration of the First Principles of Socialism' by the Glasgow

[224] Matthew Worley, *The Foundations of the British Labour Party* (Oxford: Routledge Press, 2016), p.169.
[225] F. Reid, 'Socialist Sunday Schools in Britain 1892-1939', International Review of Social History, Vol. 1 (1966), p.22.
[226] Ibid., p.34.

Union in 1908, was a staging post in revealing the aims of the majority outside of Lancashire. Principle seven revealed the ethical nature of the non-Lancastrians. 'On what principles does socialism rest? Answer. Socialism rests on the great principles of love, justice and truth'.[227] By 1909, the SSS movement had five Unions across the country.[228] For Reid, the Lancastrians 'adhered to a kind of socialism which had little time for ethics. Their social analysis owed much to the Marxism of the SDF which was strong….influenced by the adhesion to determinism'.[229] A cursory local investigation of the SSS in Lancashire reveals that, just like the branches of the SDF, the politics of the SSS movement was far from straight-forward and that more local investigation is required if historians are to fully comprehend socialist politics on the ground.

Yet, it is in the detail of the movements and their individuals where a more accurate account is located 'more important for the Socialist Sunday School movement in the long run…were second-rank adherents…especially Archie Mc Arthur, Lizzie Glasier and Alex Gossip'.[230] These individual devotees would inevitably leave their own distinctive interpretations upon the movement.[231] Just like SDF activists, the instructor himself/herself would be of crucial importance. Amy Fozard, a self-employed dressmaker taught Economics and Politics at the Clover Street Unitarian Church Sunday School in Rochdale. In 1908, she received a Workers Education Association (WEA) scholarship and also acted as a distributor for *The Highway* the local WEA magazine.[232] Her Sunday school students may have received little Marxist education but they would have been infected with the nonconformist values of self-help and cooperation where 'whole social life depended on t'owd store and the chapel'.[233] Most notably, the *Young Socialist* ran a feature on its teachers. Emblematic of mill towns,

[227] Ibid., p.47.
[228] Ibid., p.27.
[229] Ibid., p.34.
[230] Ibid., p.23.
[231] Ibid., p.27.
[232] Gary Heywood Everett, *Rochdale's Pioneers of Worker Education* (Rochdale: Createspace Independent Publishing, 2016), p.96.
[233] Ibid., p.59.

teachers were said to be 'active', 'ardent trade unionists' or 'not afraid of work'.[234] These were characteristics of a dominant mill town environment, which admired hard work and fairness more than militancy and revolt and affected the labour movement inclusive of SDF activists themselves.

An extract from the *Young Socialist* of April 1912, tellingly reveals the true nature of the character of several mill town SSS in Lancashire:

> Bolton, on the last open Sunday the school bade good bye to one of its scholars, who is bound for Australia…Blackburn, the local British Socialist Party has held a sale of work, at which the School Dramatic Society and the Girls' Guild rendered valuable service…West Salford, on Sunday 3rd March, a naming service was held, when two baby comrades were welcomed…Nelson, the teaching of the Morris Dance is to be extended to many more scholars. Average attendance, 148. Collection for month, £1 7 shillings. Sale of magazine 58.[235]

To what extent these competing organisations affected the SDF mill town branches is difficult to assess. In 1909, one Labour Church branch proudly asserted that it was 'the common meeting ground of men and women representing all sections of the Socialist movement – where the SDF lion may lie down with the ILP lamb and receive the benediction of the Fabian – the Church fulfils an extremely useful purpose'.[236] In stark contrast, Chris Waters has argued that members of the SDF felt 'that [Cinderella] clubs absorbed much of the energy that should have been devoted to those forms of political activity necessary for the realization of a socialist society'.[237] These contrasting positions state, by their very opposites, that no uniform explanation can give a single account and that an understanding of socialist politics has to be anchored in multi-diversity.

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[234] Jessica Gerrard, 'Little Soldiers for Socialism: Childhood and Socialist Politics in the British Socialist Sunday School Movement', *International Review of Social History*, 58, 2013, p.89.
[235] *Young Socialist*, April 1912.
[236] Inglis, 'The Labour Church', p.459.
[237] Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Culture*, p.88.

The diverse origins of the schools and the large geographical expanse created an organisation that, very much like the SDF, was national in character but federal in operation, another socialist-orientated body that was ostensibly directed by localism. In part, the SSS and the SDF both grew out of a consciousness of failure to make an impact on the working-class electorate. Both organisations established branches throughout the country, often led by small determined sets of socialists, who would have their own unique interpretation of what socialism was and how one might go about achieving it. Socialist Sunday Schools were supported, utilized and sometimes opposed by members of the SDF. They operated social activities, in the form of leisure pastimes, often in the guise of religious camouflage to attract members. They were a conduit into socialism and no doubt did valuable work in the field of recruitment and ideology, but the blur between competing creeds would mean that ultimately young minds could be influenced by Mary Gray, Karl Marx, Cissy Foley or John Trevor.

Conclusion

Two reoccurring aspects reveal themselves with regard to socialisation and distractions: the contradictions within the SDF and the importance of the mill town environments. First, though we can acknowledge that individual SDF members had different approaches to socialisation, too often one can locate a negative disposition. James Leatham claimed that the British worker was 'not a man of exalted ideals nor high-pitched social ambitions'.[238] Annie Oldacre, Secretary for Blackburn SDF, reported in 1897 that though the branch had acquired a billiard table, it was not without 'I am sorry to say, some determined opposition from some of our members who fear it will have a demoralizing effect on our workers'.[239] In effect, a detached or disdainful position all too often alienated the party and showed a lack of understanding for mill town culture. In addition, socialists often disagreed as to what was wrong with leisure and how one ought to address the issue. The huge 3,000-seater Manchester music

[238] Graham Johnson, *'Social Democratic Politics in Britain 1881-1911. The Marxism of the SDF'*, (unpublished BA thesis, University of Hull, 1988), p.242
[239] *Justice*, 16 January 1897.

hall, the Palace of Varieties, was supported by Blatchford but critiqued by SDF members Thorne and Burns. Their criticism that the institution was not free from foul language, drunkenness and bawdiness, rested on bourgeois sentiments of respectability and decorum. The paradox was that 'the revolutionaries' sometimes shared society's existing mores and rules, yet they themselves were often criticised for not being respectable in their own protest actions. It was a paradox from which many in the SDF could not escape.[240] SDF declarations exposed how, 'socialists were prisoners of a cultural discourse…impatient, condescending and contemptuous', which would exclude a large majority of workers.[241] Ultimately, all too often the SDF Executive failed to lead and a federal approach left Lancashire activists to their own means. Dan Irving spoke of 'People's Palaces', where drink would be available but 'objectionable features' would be removed.[242] No evidence exists to confirm that Irving's plans ever got beyond the drawing board. The independent fiercely federal nature of Lancashire meant Irving and much of Nelson were teetotal but Bolton was not. The SDF was not a unified and standardized identity, even or especially in Lancashire.

Connected to these integral SDF contradictions was a mill town culture of contradiction and complexity. It was a culture of weavers, religion, drink, sport and respectability, yet none of these factors were simple or straight-forward. Weavers' held different incomes, some were Methodists and some were Catholics, many drank some did not and interpretations of respectable could easily diverge. All these factors provide reasons why the SDF activists would find it difficult to adjust and take one correct political decision. As Walton pointed out, Lancashire possessed compelling social factors, to an extent unique, which created a particular commercial sporting environment 'found in a combination of high family incomes, strong sporting traditions, clusters of settlements with strong identities and well-developed civic pride in close proximity to each other'.[243] Not participating in vital and popular areas of

[240] Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Culture*, p. 31-32.
[241] Ibid., p. 188.
[242] Ibid., pp.135-136.
[243] Walton, 'The origins of Working-Class Spectator Sport', p. 133

workers' socialisation precluded the SDF activists from gaining workers' support. Workers' respectability was a choice of role rather than a universal normative mode and its instrumental or calculative deployment saw weavers hardly ever advance beyond their immediate community and the rule of law.[244] One contemporary argued that 'the politics of a town are determined solely by the relative number of spindles and looms driven by Tory or Liberal employers'.[245] The internal machinations of local politics were based on the mill and 'class lines had not become too sharp'.[246] Employers who cultivated a good relationship with their workers would have prevented discussion of a socialist revolution. In this social sphere of sporting dedication and factory loyalty, an absence from important areas of workers socialisation could only alienate the SDF more than encourage its support. Specific mill town environments in Lancashire, particular to each individual town, were also most influential. By 1906, the Burnley Cooperative had 15,000 members; this represented a huge 70% of the town.[247] The problem for the SDF was that the Cooperative, 'far from representing an alternative system of society provided integration into the existing economy.[248] In Brierfield and Nelson, the Women's Cooperative Guild (WCG) aided Cooper in her political training. In Burnley, the organisation was much more an auxiliary of the Liberals, 'its leadership [was] closely tied to membership of the Rechabites'.[249] It was local structures, rather than national structures, that were often the key to action.

The SDF were operating in a period of history when an abundance of 'isms' and competing organisations existed. All these groupings competed for audiences and the SDF would have to strive against an ever-growing amount of temptations and creeds. Simultaneously, these various organisations illustrate how interconnected socialist

[244] Peter Bailey, 'Will The Real Bill Banks Please Stand Up', Towards a Role Analysis of Mid-Victorian Working-Class Respectability', *Journal of Social History*, 12:3 (1979), p.338.
[245] W. A. Abram, 'Social Conditions and Political Prospects of the Lancashire Workman', *Fortnightly Review*, (October 1868), p.437.
[246] Joyce, 'The Factory Politics', pp.541 and 528.
[247] Geoffrey Trodd, 'Political Change and the Working-Class in Blackburn and Burnley 1880-1914' (unpublished PhD, University of Lancaster, 1978), p.285.
[248] Ibid., p.285.
[249] Ibid., p.286.

groupings were and how individual interpretations of socialism existed, suggesting that homogenous concepts of political parties overlook complexities and simplify the reality of labour history. This point is reinforced in Rohan Mc William's recent study of London's West End. Mc William notes that leisure in the West End was a cultural Big Bang which consisted of contrasting elements of both imperialism and revolt. Importantly he concludes that notions of class did not map onto the fluidity of expression and that the 'cultural experience offered by mass entertainment was a form of social glue'.[250] In the end this adhesive, socialisation and leisure, provided the workers with a host of 'rights' away from the workplace: the right to bet; the right to go on holiday and the right to consume a growing list of materialistic products. All of these rights tied the workers closer to the status quo.

Leisure and distraction left no part of society untouched and impeded the progress of socialism. Keir Hardie experienced a humbling by sport in November 1908, when one of his political meetings 'was in the position of being the rival attraction to a rugby match and had comparatively few hearers'.[251] Bruce Glasier complained bitterly that at one of his speeches he had to compete with 'a nigger medicine man, children on swings and variety show – all against me'.[252] Even during the weavers' union closed shop dispute in 1912, leisure found a way to permeate the circumstances: 'the picture theatres are reaping a harvest. They have arranged afternoon performances, in addition to those given in the evening, and the buildings are crowded for each entertainment'.[253] No doubt under psychological duress, hungry and possibly quite despondent, the vast majority of weavers still preferred light entertainment before revolution. As McKibbin, has noted, 'the leisure activities of the working classes were a formidable competitor to party politics….because they dissolved the proletariat into clubs, societies, informal associations, sporting loyalties and private hobbies and put many workingmen outside the activities and claims of the official political parties'.[254]

[250] McWilliam, *London's West End*, p. 316
[251] *Wigan Observer*, 17 November 1908.
[252] David Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party, 1888-1906,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), p.339.
[253] *Manchester Guardian*, 12 January 1912.
[254] McKibbin. 'Why was there no Marxism', p.328.

Ivan Maisky, Soviet Ambassador to Britain, reinforced this position with straight-forward language. At the end of his visit to Burnley at the start of the century, he concluded that 'it would seem that it [working men] is devoted mainly to three things – the public bar, the working men's club and sport'.[255]

[255] Ivan Maisky, *Journey into the Past* (London: Hutchinson Press, 1962), p.206.

Chapter 4

Lancashire Women and the SDF

The question of women and their role in and around the Social Democratic Federation in Lancashire is complex and interwoven. Unlike the mythologized women of the ILP, such as Caroline Martyn and Katherine Conway, 'the SDF seems to have been less concerned to dwell on its own 'heroic' past and never sought to elevate its 'martyr' ….to the saint-like status that Caroline Martyn acquired in the ILP'.[1] This reluctance tends to direct the researcher to investigate women across many socialist groupings and parties. If we begin our analysis from an understanding that many female Lancastrian socialist pioneers had multi-party membership during their political lives, then we can extrapolate from a broader field of left-wing politics a more informed picture of female socialist pioneers around the SDF at the turn of the century. In addition, the position of women in the SDF is one that is heavily tainted with the historiographical stain of the executive position and an investigation into local branch history will provide greater range and enhance our understanding. Hyndman and Quelch's promotion of an adult suffrage position in preference to the limited women female position, in itself not a gender locus, but one easily interpreted in that manner. Importantly, this executive position does not tell us anything about SDF Lancastrian women on the ground.

The Lancashire context was most influential as the weaving industry was unique and the Lancashire mill towns, as we have seen, would generate a very particular environment filled with multiple workers' organisations and a fascination for leisure. The percentage of women employed in weaving in 1911 under the age of 35 in Preston, Burnley and Blackburn was, 50.5, 59.7 and 63.9 respectively, with the national

[1] June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist Women: Britain 1880's to 1920's* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.33.

average for the same period was 10 percent.[2] Mill towns would produce a specific culture that prioritized the notion of respectability, hard work and personal independence and did not prize education, a central SDF tenant of reform. The 'Veterans Roll' in the *Cotton Factory Times* 1913 highlighted and venerated several women weavers who had worked in the mills all their lives. With distinct pride, they boasted that 'the prospect of a life of leisure had for them no charms … a typical, hard-working Lancashire woman'.[3] This Lancashire female independence would be a mind-set the mill town SDF branches found hard to penetrate and would comprise of many practical pressing mill issues, which would compete for attention. Reared in an environment where schooling and employers would reinforce 'domesticity as woman's natural domain', factory girls would have to face criticisms about good housewifery because they were absent from home and low wage levels because they competed for jobs and were often paid less in many other industries. Addressing issues like the 'family wage' and having one's own children working in the mill were issues influenced by 'the organisation of factory weaving in ways consistent with patriarchal values' where women were excluded from positions of authority.[4] It ought to come as no surprise that female weavers rarely engaged in political activity beyond the union ballot. As Mary McCarthy noted, often the full extent of a woman weaver's ambition would have 'been to work under a good overlooker'.[5]

Moreover, although Selina Cooper and Ethel Holdsworth would challenge the status quo in Lancashire, the lack of support and directives these activists received from the SDF executive leads one to question just what role, if any, the party played in their actions. That Cooper and Holdsworth utilized the SDF is hardly in doubt, but to what extent the SDF party exerted influence on these women is open to conjecture. Similar to their male counterparts, SDF women often acted alone and unrestricted, and were,

[2] Harold Benenson, 'The Family Wage and Working Women's Consciousness in Britain, 1880-1914', *Politics and Society,* 19:1, 1991, p.77.
[3] *Cotton Factory Times*, 7 February 1913.
[4] Meg Gomersall, 'Challenges and changes? The education of Lancashire factory women in the later nineteenth century', *History of Education*, 24:2, 1995, p. 169
[5] Jan Lambertz, 'Sexual Harassment in the Nineteenth-Century English Cotton Industry', *History Workshop Journal*, 19:1, March 1985, p.50.

at times, critical of the party. This chapter will demonstrate that support for the SDF was complex and individualistic. It will demonstrate that local histories enhance national history by moving beyond binary interpretations between just sex and class, 'to one that recognizes the complex ways in which [Labour] women developed and negotiated their political identities'.[6] Looking at several examples of how socialist women developed and constructed their own political identities and how Lancashire was important to these characteristics will reveal how Lancashire women interpreted socialism in their own particular ways. Vitally, this study will also acknowledge that political issues at hand were often more important than political parties and that SDF women's strategies and methods were sometimes based on a misunderstanding of their audiences and missed their target. These Lancashire women remind that the local reveals a history that was nuanced and shaped by a very particular environment, where individualism and a mill town culture were two simultaneous and interactive factors.

Developing Political Identities

Women in the SDF have been studied primarily from one historiographical perspective and a somewhat distorted and stereotyped view has developed which has labelled the party as misogynistic and women's role within it as being insignificant. The conventional wisdom that the ILP was sympathetic to women and that the SDF was wholly misogynistic is too simple a broad stroke from the historians' palette. Recently, historians have noted that the dichotomy between influential factors at local and national levels has developed our understanding. Pamela Graves outlined how women in the Labour Party who attempted to construct a 'women-centred' socialism had the greatest success at local level. Traditional ideas about gender roles may have undermined women at a national level, but at the grass-roots these ideas could be

[6] Matthew Worley, *The Foundations of the British Labour Party* (London: Routledge, 2009), p.175.

seen as well-suited for a reform programme of welfare and care.[7] Karen Hunt's work on the SDF has provided more complexity to the issue. Hunt showed us that female attendance at ILP and SDF party conferences was very similar, around ten per cent, and Hunt raised questions about fixed party loyalties and the need to move away from leadership only accounts. Certainly, SDF members could have a local political culture different to the national executive; they could have a steadfast position on suffrage or an adaptable one. Love or death, financial problems, children or food concerns could adversely affect them. Crucially, these issues were often more important than the framing of political identities. The general stereotyping of women has been reinforced by historians. David Howell argued rather one dimensionally that socialist women were either middle-class propagandists or working-class tea makers.[8] This categorization is too simplistic, ignoring the wide variety of ways in which women engaged with socialist politics. Harriet Beanland a supporter of Nelson SDF was a tailoress, a member of the local ILP, a Poor Law Guardian and a suffrage supporter.[9] Mary Gray had a lower middle-class background and from the age of fifteen had worked in service. Married to a stonemason who was often unemployed, Gray lived a life of considerable financial hardship.[10] This diversity of women's social and economic backgrounds meant that class positions and the way activists approached politics would be both contingent and complex. Cathy Hunt touched on the complexity of the politicization of women activists. Hunt claimed that 'overlapping layers of formative experience' produced female political activists. Enid Stacy developed her socialist engagement from her Christian Socialist upbringing. Isabella Ford came into politics through a learned sense of the inadequacies of the political ideologies of Liberalism and Toryism. For Gertrude Tuckwell, Secretary of the Women's Trade Union League, the formative layers were 'moulded by both the political and moral training that she received from her family and by her class upbringing'.[11] Hunt concluded that historians ought 'to avoid making

[7] P. Graves, 'An experiment in women-centered socialism: Labour women in Britain', in *Women and Socialism. Socialism and Women. Europe between the Two World Wars*, ed. by H. Gruber and P. Graves (Oxford, Berghan, 1998), p.211.
[8] David Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party, 1888-1906*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), p.330.
[9] Jill Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel* (London: Virago Press, 1984), p.128.
[10] Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women*, p. 36.
[11] Cathy Hunt, 'Gertrude Tuckwell and the British Labour Movement, 1891-1921: A study in motives and influences', *Women's History Review*, 22:3, 2013, p.492.

generalisations about labour activists because none of them fits neatly into categories of 'types'.[12] A process, to this point, reinforced by general histories.

A further intricacy is added to our understanding when we take into account the different generations of socialist women and the time when they were involved in politics. Earlier activists like Annie Besant who joined the SDF in the mid-1880s and Charlotte Despard, who joined the SDF in 1895, were middle-class women who were not expected to take up paid employment and could take advantage of an instructed education. They had in common 'a consciousness of their own independence and an interest in the politics of gender'.[13] Later female converts were no less diverse, but the increase in paid positions within the labour movement and the number of teaching opportunities for women altered the amount of time some woman could give to the movement and their attitudes towards political issues. In Lancashire, Ada Nield Chew, who had worked as a tailoress, became a trade union organizer. Enid Stacy who had been trained as a teacher took up full time lecturing for the ILP. Notably, Selina Cooper and Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had both worked as weavers in Lancashire, which provided them with a direct connection to workers and a distinct advantage that many middle-class women lacked. One way to move beyond the top/down 'broad sweeps' approach of earlier SDF history is to consider as many individual life stories as possible. Life stories are not without their problems, and as Israel has noted, 'historians can only hope to tell one among many possible versions of a life'.[14] However, one can get closer to multiple identities and multiple explanations by understanding that there was a creative interaction between individuals and life, and in turn between context and action.

This chapter investigates the local SDF female activists within the context of Lancashire's mill towns and reinforces the position that only through local

[12] Ibid., p.482.
[13] Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women*, p.38.
[14] K. Israel, 'Writing inside the Kaleidoscope: re-presenting Victorian women public figures', *Gender and History*, 2:1 (1990), p.9.

investigation can a closer understanding of the SDF and the labour movement in general be acquired. The journeys of women in SDF mill town branches throws light on three important issues. First, and foremost, that the development of women's engagement in local politics was often dependent on the force of individual and independent personalities. Second, that mill town Lancashire provided a unique environment, which sometimes assisted and sometimes impeded SDF progress. Third, that suffrage was closely interlinked with socialism and a distinct difference would exist between female weavers and party activists, underlining and reflecting the complex nature of socialist histories. Finally, that although SDF women would sometimes misjudge their weavers' audiences, they were relentlessly persistent and unwittingly paved the way for the next 'socialist' party of the future. In stark contrast to general histories Lancashire goes a long way in revealing the inadequacies of the 'broad sweep' approach to history and highlights the key roles played by individuals within a unique social environment

Barriers

One of the chief forums at the end of the nineteenth century for political address was the public platform and its representation in the press. Women would have to break into this space if they wished to make political address. 'For women without previous exposure to public speaking, mounting a public platform for the first time to address a mixed audience was a step of gigantic proportions'.[15] Opposition to female speakers came from every corner of society and at times could be violent. Even a young Beatrice Webb on observing Annie Besant recalled how 'to see her speaking made me shudder. It is not womanly to thrust yourself before the world'.[16] One contemporary historian considered female public speaking to be 'immodest, indecorous, unwomanly and unbecoming for a woman to speak in public'.[17] During the nineteenth century, women

[15] Lilian Lewis Shiman, *Women and Leadership in Nineteenth Century England* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992), p. 129.
[16] Ibid., p.135.
[17] Ibid., p.134.

struggled to articulate their opinions and simultaneously maintain their feminine respectability. Gradual gains, though, were made by women. American anti-slavery campaigner, Sara Pugh, went public in Leeds in 1852: 'I actually made a speech'.[18] The *Leeds Mercury* noted of Clara Balfour's lectures at the Mechanics Institute that 'there is as much delight and entertainment derived from a lady lecturer'.[19] Three avenues of organisational development assisted more women in overcoming their moral restrictions and fears. First, temperance organisation encouraged women to be more active. 'Lancashire … was also the home of the prohibitionist party … the diocese of Manchester was particularly active'.[20] The Independent Order of the Good Templars encouraged both its male and female crusaders to address audiences. Second, Sunday schools' teaching, though more limited, was an important platform made available for many middle and working-class women to begin practicing speaking before a completely strange body of listeners. Third, in the Quaker movement, women were expected to speak if the spirit moved them. From 1870 to the end of the century, women's groups developed and female speakers increased in number. Lady Elizabeth Biddulph became the vocal champion and President of the Women's Total Abstinence Union. In Lancashire by 1890, the Manchester and Salford Women's Christian Temperance Association had twenty-six branches and a membership of 2,000.[21] Though the majority of women were still ignored or without a political forum, several individuals were beginning to find their voices and quite literally become heard.

In 1894, the decision to abolish the property qualification for people wishing to stand for election to public office effectively opened up the opportunity for women to stand as Poor Law guardians. Countess Warwick, a staunch supporter of the SDF, was elected as a workhouse trustee in 1895 and more would follow in similar roles. By 1895, 'there were 802 female 'guardians' in England, with 86 in London and a notable 70 in Lancashire', a reflection on the political assignation of women in the county.[22] These

[18] Simon Morgan, 'Seen but not Heard? Women's Platforms, Respectability, and Female Publics in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', *Nineteenth Century Prose*, 29:1, Spring 2002, p.58.
[19] *Leeds Mercury*, 29 August 1846.
[20] Lilian Lewis Shiman, *Crusade Against Drink in Victorian England* (London: Longman Press, 1988), p.48.
[21] Shiman, *Women and Leadership*, p.152.
[22] Steven King, 'We Might Be Trusted', *International Review of Social History*, no 49, 2004, p.29.

women began to make a difference and began to challenge the existing social and political order; some of them devoted socialists who worked on behalf to the SDF. 'The Bolton Association for the Return of Women as Poor Law Guardians was formed in 1897 with an implicit brief to encourage women of the laboring classes to become guardians'.[23] Mary Haslam, the daughter of a Liberal magistrate in Bolton, provides an example of a successful local female guardian and of female strategies that 'allows us to question broad generalisations about the effectiveness of women in local government'.[24] Haslam's involvement with the Bolton Workhouse Visiting Committee produced a host of changes. In August 1894, she recommended that a paid midwife be placed on staff at the workhouse and the classification of mental patients was introduced.[25] Haslam was successful in implementing these changes because she built up her arguments by being well-informed and visiting Poor Law institutions across Lancashire. She was assiduous in networking male guardians at an individual level, often inviting them for dinner or tea. A third tactic she applied was the use of conciliatory language instead of a language of conflict.[26] Haslam was presenting an example for others to follow and providing lessons as she proceeded. As Steven King noted, if we are to further our understanding of the role of women in politics during this era, then, 'to achieve more, we must move from the general to the local'.[27]

One vital aspect of Lancashire life that SDF women would need to understand was a very particular mill town workers' culture and an industrial mill town environment that would contain, at varying economic stages of development, both elements of poverty and significant sectors of mill hands with disposable incomes. A shared mill town culture meant that SDF women activists would need to impress the poor and the more affluent and this in turn would require flexibility in political approach that in itself could be contradictory. A simple Marxist revolutionary doctrine would appeal less to a female weaver earning lucrative disposable income. These factors of separate

[23] Ibid., p.44.
[24] Ibid., p.33.
[25] Ibid., p.35.
[26] Ibid., p.43.
[27] Ibid., p.46.

categories of workers' affluence reveal the existence of workers' interactive tensions and the importance of local context in interpreting women's roles and SDF fortunes. A stratum of impoverished workers existed in all the mill towns. A contemporary Medical Officer's report related how 'a weaver's wage will not allow for a wife to remain at home, considering the high rents and rates, and so both go … and a hand-to-mouth existence results even for themselves'.[28] Poorer families supplemented their incomes in a host of ways; women took in washing for others, children ran hot meals to the factories at lunchtime, while hawking wares and gathering scraps were two other ordinary pastimes. To adapt to these trying conditions families were large and interdependent and took in lodgers where possible. 'Nearly a quarter of households in Blackburn and Burnley contained at least one related member other than husband, wife, or child: sisters, in-laws, grandchildren'.[29] In this environment, one quarter of women would experience the death of a sibling growing up as a child. 'In the acceptance of death, can be found both the seeds and the nurturing of the fatalism which was so widely felt by both working class women and men'.[30]

However, the mill towns also possessed a large majority of female workers who were weavers. Earning about 20s to 25s a week at the turn of the century, the Lancashire context was indeed very different to many other parts of the country with women forming a substantial 62 per cent of the cotton industry labour force.[31] In comparison to their male counterparts, 'near equality of men's and women's wages ensued'.[32] In relation to other workers, this was a significant wage. Top paid mule spinners could earn 40s a week. Skilled grinders and strippers could average around 30s. However, the real significance lay in the fact that 'a family living on a pound (20s) a week was poor'.[33] Therefore, one weaver's wage of 20s-25s a week by necessity drew wives and children into the work force and many mill town households existed on a 'family

[28] G. Newman, 'Infant Mortality', Burnley Medical Officer Report, (1906) p.8.
[29] Ibid., p. 209.
[30] Ibid., p. 20.
[31] Alan Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton Operatives and Work 1900-1950* (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2003), p. 45
[32] Trevor Griffiths, *The Lancashire Working Classes 1880-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), p. 107
[33] Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton*, p. 45

wage'. Women weavers worked about sixty hours a week, usually had a large family of children, were unable to vote and were not encouraged to be politically active. Some Weavers Institutes did not have ladies toilets and male weavers' leaders would typically define women's roles.[34] President of the Weavers' Amalgamation, J. W. Ogden, noted that women seldom wished to be union collectors because it was 'not to their taste' and David Shackleton believed that 'when girls go home at night they don't want to turn out again to committees'.[35] This male dominated position and the immediate concerns of day-to-day domestic existence was part of a weaver's mind-set. Women weavers recalled earning 9s a week as teenagers, having dentures at 21 and visiting markets late at night to buy cheap fish.[36] Others recollected the benevolent nature of their employers 'the Harvey's were more advanced than any mills for miles around'.[37] Once again, aspects of a weavers' cuture lay paradoxically side by side. Often poverty was a feature of normal life but simultaneously women workers were appreciative of a good mill employer they would willingly work for. Women's roles were prescribed and women imbibed a strong sense of domestic responsibility, yet they often dominated the weaver workforce. 'Separate spheres is seen to have resulted in the internalization of its central precept: that women's prime responsibility lay in domestic management'.[38] These contradictory components of women's roles produced a mill town culture that though general in many respects was also often fragmented and would ensure that women reacted differently to political circumstances. As Walton noted a paradox existed wherein female weavers 'were at once particularly receptive to the arguments of suffrage campaigners, while finding it particularly difficult to respond to them … given the burden of the twin responsibilities of domestic work and wage-labour'.[39]

[34] Ibid., p.50.
[35] Ibid., p.50.
[36] Annie Oldham, 'Do You Remember', *Living History Workshop, Rochdale College of Adult Education*, 1974, Ref BO2, p. 25-27
[37] Roy MacElwee, *The Remarkable Reign of Lancashire's King of Cotton* (Rochdale: Roy MacElwee Publishers, 2014), Mrs Kirby Reminisces, Ref M31, p. 107
[38] Griffiths, *The Lancashire Working Classes,* p. 261
[39] John K. Walton, *Lancashire a Social History, 1558-1939*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p. 283

The availability of factory work for women gave the Lancastrians a marked financial advantage but also a less than radical approach towards politics. This substantial augmenting of family incomes 'set the cotton district apart from the rest of Lancashire as from almost the whole of Britain'.[40] Weavers' families and women accrued disposable income to the extent that 'the scope for additional family incomes undoubtedly redounded to the benefit of working-class people in the cotton towns in visible and tangible ways'.[41] These workers possessed an outlook wherein 'more prosperous wives … valued their economic independence and skills'.[42] However, as the Pilgrim Trust would later report of Blackburn in 1938 that 'the wages of most of the Lancashire cotton towns assume the double earnings of man and wife. The husband's wage alone would reduce many families into poverty and it is consequently necessary for the wife to earn all the time'.[43] This particular work environment and its limited pathway away from poverty would not be favourably disposed to supporting long-term socialist strategies and most certainly not one that took income away from their children. The Preston Weavers, Winders, and Warpers Association, although it had a large membership, was remarkably unmilitant'.[44] Placing SDF ideologies in comparison to this particular weavers' lifestyle reveals a considerable gap. Though threatened by poor health and housing and a fluctuating cotton economy, frugality and many children in work could provide more disposable income. Holding the purse strings of the family economy, female weavers often lived in a reality of pecuniary readiness where a remote socialist ideological future would be the very least of their concerns.

Into this diverse mill culture, we can also detect a long imbedded belief in authority. Elisabeth Roberts found in her oral survey of north Lancashire that

> obedience to authority was an attitude inculcated in the family which was naturally extended to employers. It was unlikely that at any time in this period working-class girls entered the world of work determined to challenge the

[40] Walton, *Lancashire a Social History,* p. 288
[41] Ibid., p. 287
[42] Benenson, 'The Family Wage', p.78.
[43] Elisabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p. 147
[44] Ibid., p. 147

> authority of their employer. The majority of women in the sample, and indeed in all three towns, never went on strike, nor became involved in organized disputes or conflicts with their employers.[45]

Edward Cadbury made very similar observations, noting that 'the generally uncomplaining nature of factory girls, afraid of their employers, and generally accepting their working conditions'.[46] Labour activist Ada Nield Chew, wrote a series of short stories before 1914, which she labelled as 'true stories'. These sketches depicted women in Lancashire and their day-to-day existence. *The Charwoman* describes a Mrs W earning £1 a week with six children: 'in this way I have learnt of the continued improvement following the entry of each child into the labour market'. In *All in the Day's Work,* one follows a married couple with two children through an ordinary day at the mill 'Mr Bolt … reading the cricket news, proceeds to wash himself, and to change into his 'second best' preparatory to spending the evening at the Working Men's Club Institute'.[47] The ambience of Chew's tales are unmistakably a story of proud weavers resilience and parsimony in a life attached to trade unions, evidence that suggests that Lancastrian workers were always more closer to respectful compliance than revolution.

An understanding of mill culture is further complicated by independent mill yard cultures, layers of social stratification that included different levels of weavers' interests and issues that were more pressing than socialist politics to women weavers. In Nelson in 1892, an overlooker at Walverden's Weaving Shed, Brook Street, was accused by women of making immoral propositions. After a protracted strike, the overlooker was found guilty by a tribunal of three local clergymen and dismissed. Twenty years later, another case of sexual harassment was taken up in Todmordern in 1912. Mill girls accused another overlooker of molestation in a dark passageway. In this case, no conclusive ending was acquired. These two cases reflect the complexity of industrial local circumstances and the particular culture from mill to mill. The first case

[45] Ibid., p. 46.
[46] Edward Cadbury, *Women's Work and Wages: A Phase of Life in an Industrial City* (Forgotten Books, 2017), p. 72.
[47] Doris Nield Chew, *Ada Nield Chew* (London: Virago Press, 1982), pp. 137 & 165

at Nelson was resolved in the union's favour because a large majority of the workforce came out on strike.[48] In Todmorden, unemployment rates were higher and union membership was 'not organized as it should be'.[49] What is of more interest is that the participants were motivated by other factors. The Nelson union lost no time in attaching to the dispute the need to remove the overlooker control of the slate and board system. In Todmorden, the virtues of the union intervention were overshadowed by a debate about public morality. Newspaper correspondents were more concerned about the 'foul aspersions in regard to the mill life and morals in our district'.[50] Male trade union domination meant that men were helping women on male terms and the social space in mills reinforced gender division. Typically, no one would suggest that women should become overlookers to redress the situation. Importantly, mill towns had unique communities of their own and these working populations would develop even more localised practices, from mill to mill. Lancashire's female weavers may well have 'contravened the Victorian family ideal' by working but they were considered well paid and often worked alongside their own children.[51] Importantly, female weavers' experiences could be different from mill to mill and though common grievances and causes would develop across mills, often independent mill yard politics could be just as influential. An SDF activist would need to understand and infiltrate these spaces and these values of micro politics if they were to make any progress.

Into this complex cultural context would come two factors that provoked change. First, some girls disliked working in the mills intensely. 'More girls appear to have disliked weaving, or indeed mill work in general, than to have liked it…. It is astonishing that so many stood it as long as they did: their toleration can only be explained in terms of … overwhelming need their families had for their wages'.[52] Second, militant socialist women, both of a well-known and less-known stature, began to make themselves heard. Elisabeth Roberts noted tellingly of her militant mentor Mrs

[48] *Colne and Nelson Times*, 19 February 1892.
[49] Lambertz, 'Sexual Harassment in the Nineteenth Century', p.37.
[50] *Todmordern and District News*, 28 February 1913.
[51] Benenson, 'The Family Wage', p.71.
[52] Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p.59.

Richardson, 'almost all came from relatively prosperous backgrounds and had higher aspirations about their standards of living … they expected good meals, adequate clothing, and a chance to be educated'.[53] The combination of economic slumps and the development of socialist activists and their greater expectations would provide the SDF women with an opportunity. However, the culture of immediacy and acceptance bolstered by a growing consumerism was never far from influence. As Walton recognised, socialist politics was often impeded because 'divisions within the working class … were too deeply ingrained, and the identification of the existing state of things with 'common sense' was too firmly established'.[54] Therefore, mill town Lancashire contained a large number of frugal working women, who worked but could not vote. Another significant proportion of women's voices, because of poor education, ignorance or lack of recorded evidence, would not be heard. Those that were heard revealed their concerns were their large families and the day-to day financial survival. Many fatalistically accepted their place in society. 'And I wish I could do something, but I am only a poor hardworking wife, with little children to look after. And I seem to have no time and no opportunity'.[55] They had a moral code that concerned itself primarily with subsistence, working hard and being neighbourly. Alice Woodhead remembered how 'doctors were paid through a sick club, but calling them was usually a last measure, illnesses were normally left to take their own course'.[56] John Travis related that his mother was an indefatigable worker 'with her washing day on Monday and baking day on Thursday, and every other day with its multifarious duties, she was always at work. As is the case in most working-class homes'.[57]

Another common practice in all mills, and one that would prove decisive for the SDF, was the employment of half-timers (children). It was a system ordained by providence and justified by utility, a system calculated to exist for all time. The Mayor of Burnley thought it impossible to 'imagine a more healthy and reasonable mode of bringing up a

[53] Ibid., p.50.
[54] Walton, *Lancashire a Social History*, p. 275
[55] *Clarion*, Woman's Column, 9 November 1895
[56] MacElwee, *The Remarkable Reign Of Lancashire's King Cotton*, Ref M31, 1974, p. 21
[57] John Stott Travis, 'My Memories', Rochdale Archives, Ref, G3 TRA, p. 66

child'.[58] Half-timers were a vital aspect for many weaving families' weekly incomes and any attempt to reduce this income would be sternly opposed. Alan Fowler summarized the position of female weavers and their dependency on the half-time system. 'His mother was opposed to the half-time system yet Harry became her half-timer in order to avoid her losing a half a crown by having to pay another child'.[59] The weavers' culture of immediacy and the need for money circumvented the moral argument that children should not work. Concurrently, the need for money and an adherence to a hard work ethic saw many parents place the mill before education and some weavers would express a negative morality towards books. 'It was immoral to stay at school when you could be working'.[60] At odds with this day-to-day reality, the prominent tactic of mill town SDF branches was a reliance on education. An obvious impasse existed between the SDF branches and the weavers. Dan Irving placed his Burnley SDF branch against the half-time system. In 1907, the SDF made a concerted effort in north east Lancashire implementing lectures of denunciation of the half-time system. With audiences composed of 'mainly textile workers', *Justice* optimistically claimed that Mrs Bridge Adam and Dan Irving 'could not fail to win the support of the hearers'. A written circular was sent out to every working man's home 'detailing the horrible results of child labour'.[61] Irving's message that education and free school meals would substitute the half-time system found little support in the form of weavers' votes before 1914. It was neither Marxism nor anti-trade union positions that impeded the party, but the poor political strategies from individuals and a lack of understanding of the social environment the branches existed in.

From the outset, the 'woman question' in the SDF was understood and accepted as a matter of private conscience and hence it was an issue with only open-ended answers. In parallel with this ambiguous position towards women's political participation were the misogynist writings of Ernest Belfour Bax. A strident antifeminist, Bax who worked

[58] Marjorie Cruickshank, *Children and Industry: Child Health and Welfare in north-west Textile Towns during the Nineteenth-Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), p.96.
[59] Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton*, p.55.
[60] Ibid., p. 36.
[61] *Justice*, 7 December 1907.

as a barrister, was a chief theoretician of the party and edited *Justice* for a period. His work within the legal field led him to believe that women were privileged under law and in 1896 he wrote *The Legal Subjection of Men* and in 1913 *The Fraud of Feminism*. Tolerated because of his status and because his columns were confrontational in an area of socialist politics considered marginal, Bax's opinions coloured the party in a negative sheen. Some women within the party were prepared to challenge Bax and both Brixton and Willesden branches made critique in 1906.[62] Though of little impact, women within the SDF were attempting to extend their influence. The development of a voice for women within the SDF was also made more difficult by the existence of two parallel women's goals, socialism and suffrage. Though some historians have claimed that 'the woman question found a socialist answer by disappearing into the class question',[63] in reality women would chose many different paths. Mary Gawthorpe and Teresa Billington Greig chose suffrage before socialism. Some, like Lancastrians Cooper and Chew, tried to pursue both suffrage and socialist propaganda. Others took an interest in the franchise issue but rejected the limited suffrage position, such as Mary Macarthur and Kathleen Kough. A host of arguments about sex and class covered the period. Lilly Bell, who equated women to 'caged birds', was at one end of the debate: 'I hope our socialist women will never forget that they are women first and socialists afterwards'. In contrast, Dora Montefiore prioritized the class struggle, criticizing feminists because they 'tried to stir up a sex-war instead of preaching class-war'.[64] These various women's journeys lead beyond simply seeking to classify one SDF approach to a more graded understanding of how different women established their political selves. The unique Lancastrian setting, with its bountiful amount of local organisations, such as the cooperative guilds, the trade unions and the suffrage groupings, and its unusually strong base of economic independent women weavers, contributed to a specific environment. This was an environment that facilitated female activists' input but limited participation by the majority of working women weavers. Most importantly, at the turn of the century socialist women often took individual positions on different political issues rather than adhere to one organisational political

[62] Karen Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists: The SDF and the Woman Question 1884-1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.62.
[63] Ibid., p.25.
[64] Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women,* p.64.

party. Once more, a better understanding of the SDF is built not upon the one-dimensional investigation of a political party but upon a host on interwoven factors such as particular individuals' contributions and a distinct social and industrial environment.

Female SDF socialists would have to contend with many obstacles in promoting their message of social revolution. Though the SDF espoused equality, it also accepted the prevailing notion of the sexual division of labour and the gap between socialist theory and practice was wide. Women would encounter open opposition and be made to feel unwelcome. They were trapped in a social milieu that encouraged their silence and they were assaulted by the party newspaper on a regular basis. SDF women spoke of being 'like a fish out of water, or a stranger listening to a foreign tongue'.[65] Another commented that 'when one sees the half-contemptuous smile, or hears the slighting remark when women are mentioned…one cannot help feeling that those socialists are not…true to their principles'.[66] Female attendance at SDF meetings was difficult because they were often responsible for household chores and children. Annie Oldacre of Blackburn SDF revealed the 'fear that they should be considered not modest – a few, or perhaps one woman – among a number of men. Or worse still they might be suspected of having an ulterior object in view'.[67] Columnists in *Justice* were particularly offensive and flippant. A correspondent nicknamed 'Tattler' wrote in response to a female issue: 'to return to our sheep – I beg their pardon, the ladies and their woes'.[68] However, SDF women challenged such views. In 1893, a correspondent named 'Hopeful' objected how 'we women feel repelled at the continual sole use of the masculine nouns and pronouns'.[69] Mary Boyd warned three years later that the newspaper's abuse was 'not calculated to induce women to join the organisation and may alienate some who belonged to it already'.[70] These misgivings did not lead to any significant alteration of position by the SDF leadership and despite requesting a

[65] *Justice,* 22 May 1909.
[66] *Ibid.*, 2 September 1893.
[67] *Ibid.*, 10 October 1896.
[68] *Ibid.*, 12 May 1894.
[69] *Ibid.*, 23 September 1893.
[70] Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists*, p.195.

women's page in *Justice* in 1893, women would have to wait another fourteen years before the request was enacted. Karen Hunt concluded that men of the party condescendingly considered their women sisters as 'necessary partners…whose preference was for social organisation…and who therefore had to be educated'.[71]

At first glance, women's involvement within the party appears rare and mundane. Women of Nelson SDF organized a tea party. Rochdale ladies sewing group was the 'life and soul of the branch' and secretarial positions were held by women in branches at Bury, Blackburn, Liverpool East, Colne and Accrington. Prior to the later Women's Circles, the role of women in the party appears predominantly organisational and social but this is a 'general' interpretation. If one looks beyond the 'general', one can find individual journeys that are very different indeed. Their discovery will go to prove that women inside the SDF found a multitude of solutions to express their own interpretations of socialism. These interpretations of local history reinforce the argument that individuals more than political parties generated SDF agitation and that a particular industrial environment impacted negatively on the SDF. The challenge that the Lancashire mills provided with their ingrained and inconsistent cultures of poverty and 'good money' meant that any appeal to a better future was enfeebled as many believed that the status quo was acceptable. 'We had neighbours, two bachelor brothers and their maiden sister, Ned, Bill and Ri. They were all in full work, when they were not on the Club, and consequently were comfortably off'.[72] Inevitably, it would not be a social environment that was easy to penetrate for any female member of the SDF.

Suffrage

[71] Karen Hunt, 'Women and the SDF: Some Notes on Lancashire', *North West Labour History Society Bulletin*, no. 7, 1980/81, p.58.
[72] John Stott Travis, 'My Memoirs', Rochdale Archives, Ref G3 TRA, p. 71

Karen Hunt would not be the first to note that 'the SDF's own ambivalences over women's work and their economic independence only reflected those of the wider society'.[73] Perhaps not surprisingly, based on what little successful action the party took on behalf of suffrage, the historiography of the SDF has often portrayed the party as anti-women.[74] The issue of suffrage is an important factor in explaining the SDF's development because it highlights differences and similarities between the national and local, and provides more examples of how women's politics, just like socialist politics, was far from cohesive. Nationally, the suffrage campaign was represented by two main bodies, the law-abiding National Union of Women's suffrage Societies (NUWSS) and the more militant WSPU. In response, the SDF established the Adult Suffrage Society (ASS) in 1903 and issued the proclamation of a suffrage manifesto. A national standpoint was made by the SDF in *Justice*, and socialist men and women were urged to 'organize active propaganda for the obtaining of full Adult Suffrage [condemning] … any agitation on the part of socialists for any limited measure'.[75] In mill town Lancashire, we can discern several types of suffrage interaction. First, would be the lumpen mass of weavers in employment who would not be overtly politically active but who would exercise their opinions through petitions and trade union organisation. Second, were the Lancastrian activists, like Cooper and Holdsworth, who were aware of the local culture and had worked as weavers. Cooper, who started work as a creeler at the age of ten, experienced emigration, lost an infant child and took in washing to pay the bills. It was not surprising that she possessed 'the rare knack of being able to persuade working-class women that suffrage was something that touched their day-to-day lives and for which they too could actively campaign'.[76] Holdsworth attended SDF meetings with her father as a young girl and had started work in the mills at the age of thirteen.[77] Both women would develop their politics not specifically attached to one political grouping and both were self-read and exceptional in that they often did not abide by the gender norms prescribed by society. Third, was the bulk of the suffrage leadership who were primarily London based (excluding the

[73] Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists*, p. 151
[74] Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women*, p.110.
[75] *Justice*, 14 December 1907.
[76] Liddington, 'The Life and Times', p. 203
[77] Roger Smalley, *Breaking The Bonds of Capitalism* (Lancaster: North West Regional Studies 2014), p. 10

Pankhursts) and middle-class. Finally, and seldom, men organized to support suffrage too. In 1908, a Manchester branch of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage was established at Portland Café on Portland Street. Noticeably, four academic professors, and not four working men, were behind the initiative.[78] These categorisations are in themselves insufficient to account for SDF actions and responses because as we have witnessed, individuals within categorisations often acted outside or beyond 'a type' of description. A look at the nature of the suffrage campaign at a local level will provide us with more examples of workers' division and intricate patterns of female SDF engagement.

Joyce Kay's analysis of suffrage activists, the *Suffrage Annual Women's Who's Who*, published in 1913, included 692 women, but noticeably not Lancastrians Cooper, Holdsworth, Chew or Roper. Kay's account notes that London social club membership was dominant. The majority of women were members of the International Women's Franchise (IWF).[79] These clubs were the result of the growth of associational cultures, while also being female emancipation escape routes, snobbish and clique ridden. Kay argues that committed suffragists were 'an offshoot of the enormous growth of associational culture in late Victorian Britain as a means of allowing women to enter the masculine world'.[80] The fact that membership of the IWF cost one guinea suggests that the suffrage leadership movement was middle class and a world removed from the inside of a weaving shed in Lancashire. In stark contrast to the club life of London, the lives that female workers lived in Lancashire shaped their priorities and their opinions in different ways.

Different types of Lancashire women further nuances our investigation and reminds that the mill town culture was diverse and complex with some female weavers in receipt of disposable income but others bound by poverty. Often categorised as

[78] *Manchester Courier*, 4 June 1908.
[79] Joyce Kay, 'No Time for Recreations till the Vote is Won? Suffrage Activists and Leisure in Edwardian Britain', *Women's History Review*, 16:4, 2007, p.545.
[80] Ibid., p.544.

'respectable' or 'rough', the stock figure in contemporary works is of a fun-loving Lancashire factory lass, depicted as hardy independent and happy-go-lucky with a fixed income. This image was reinforced in the *Cotton Factory Times. S*ocialist Allen Clarke wrote from 1892-96 about the plucky exploits of courageous mill girls, such as Alice Camerone. Advertisements in Lancashire newspapers for patent medicines, household products and boarding houses in Blackpool, underpins the fact that 'many Lancashire operatives were a relatively wealthy section of the working class – an attraction to potential advertisers'.[81] In contrast to the factory girl depiction, some women had neither the time nor money for consumerism. Recorded voices from Bolton, illustrate aspects of those lifestyles and their key influences. Witnesses revealed:

> mother had child every 2 years – only intermittent work in mill – father out of work – neighbours helpful – 7 moonlight flits, bailiffs tricked by people, men begging for half a penny to buy beer'. Another witness told 'sister had St Vitus dance – parents dreaded holidays when they had no money – had to go and pick coal themselves – neighbours swapped food with each other – children used to wear young liberal badges.[82]

The main themes of such recollections are poverty and an interest in drink. In turn, these issues reflected disadvantaged workers' everyday lives with no mention of education or emancipation. Laws governing hours of work were easily circumscribed. The 1893 Royal Commission of Labour found women in domestic service were 'worn out, tired out, ready for bed and same every morning'. Their work performed at home was endless with very little remuneration, carding buttons and hooks and eyes taking 'all the time' for average weekly earnings of just over three shillings.[83] The result being that many women still had precious little means, energy or time for political engagement because they were trapped in a vicious cycle of industrial poverty. Both 'respectable' and 'rough' Lancastrian women weavers had reasons not to follow a socialist cause. The respectable grouping because they benefitted from the status quo

[81] Fowler, 'Lancashire Cotton', p. 43
[82] Bolton Voice Archives, A. Lineen, Ref, LSS/A/005, catalogue 41, Tape 26.
[83] Catriona M. Parratt, 'Little Means or Time: Working-Class Women and Leisure in Late Victorian and Edwardian England', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 15:2, 1989, p.29.

and could engage in consumerism and the disadvantaged grouping because it is probable they were worn out or distracted by other pleasures.

A review of a suffragist meeting at the Mechanics Institute in Burnley, in November 1909, highlights the social interaction of local activists, the raw aggression and workers' opinions encountered. On the day of the address, the suffragist supporters chalked the Town Hall steps. Margaret Hewitt of Manchester Chaired the meeting and Miss Gawthorpe (titled 'the fiery cross of the North') of Leeds was the main speaker. The audience appeared evenly split between men and women and the address was punctuated from start to finish with continual interruptions. Hewitt shouted herself hoarse trying to control the meeting and there was a stream of catcalls from men in the audience: 'Chuck her out….Time…Go home and mind the baby….Cut it short'.[84] A final announcement at the end of the event that there would be a collection was greeted by groans. The atmosphere was distinctly anti-suffrage and chaotic. When reading general histories with their suffrage stories of prison visits, window breaking and 'no taxation without representation', it is easy to overlook that local women were harassed in public and that opposition from men was neither silent nor insignificant. However, the key to the entire meeting was the middle-class barrier of a 'small' entrance fee of between 1s to 3d to the lecture. As the *Burnley Express* poignantly noted this was an act sufficient 'to keep out that element which was likely to be too militant even for the militant suffragettes'.[85] The relevance being that radical socialists may well have not been present and that the suffragettes were implementing the exact same middle-class financial hurdle that most SDF branches endorsed which ignored workers' poverty. With this measure, the SDF branches were alienating support from a group of workers who had more reasons than most to wish to alter the present economic system.

[84] *Burnley Express*, 24 Nov 1909
[85] Ibid.,

In contrast, mill town SDF activists were successful when they recognised that the majority of female weavers engaged in politics when issues were grounded in grievances related to them. This would often include mill circumstances, poor sanitary conditions and bad housing. Perceiving that these issues could be addressed by acquiring the vote is what motivated some weavers to support the NUWSS. 'Lancashire women workers joined this campaign to challenge their subordinate position'.[86] With their genuine knowledge of mill life, Selina Cooper and Ethel Holdsworth were able to engage women weavers in Lancashire. Cooper was active in the 1894 union agitation to recruit the winders: 'I rather think she got those winders to join the trade union movement, because she worked with them a lot'.[87] Holdsworth regularly attended the *Clarion* café at Roughlee on the slopes of Pendle Hill where Lancashire textile workers who enjoyed walking and cycling gathered. She also wrote for the *Woman Worker* where she expressed how 'there was no sphere in which women could not contribute, and she called for all workers who did the same jobs to receive the same pay'.[88] Women weavers had a tradition of jobholding, relatively high female wages and a good knowledge of fertility control, which frequently involved abortion. It was no coincidence that Chew, Mitchell and Cooper 'reduced their fertility dramatically, giving birth to one, one, and two children respectively, compared to an average of 9 each for their mothers'.[89] In the field, activists sometimes reached the aggrieved female weavers. Cooper realized that women weavers felt ignored and she undertook suffrage work alongside her SDF work, implementing a door-to-door equal suffrage survey in Brierfield in 1904.[90] Holdsworth realized that the majority of women weavers held job security precious and a voice to speak for them could be utilised. In 1909, as a journalist at the *Woman Worker*, Holdsworth made political comment. She attacked the Labour Party's support of the 1906 Liberal Education Act, which rejected the SDF appeal for free school meals and she ridiculed Lloyd George's April 1909 budget of social welfare reform as 'half-baked'.[91] Importantly, SDF mill town women did sometimes receive support from ordinary weavers: 'the campaign for the vote could

[86] Benenson, 'The Family Wage', p.81.
[87] Liddington, *The Life and Times*, p. 59
[88] Roger Smalley, *Breaking the Bonds of Capitalism*, p.27
[89] Ibid., p.81.
[90] Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists*, p.163.
[91] Smalley, *Breaking The Bonds*, p- 24-25.

not have succeeded without this dedicated army of anonymous foot-soldiers'.[92] Significantly, female SDF activists could be successful in Lancashire when they fought for issues that were important to the women weavers' workforce.

Elizabeth Roberts concluded her Lancastrian study by stating that some women expressed indifference to the suffrage movement, feeling that it was not theirs and represented neither their particular needs nor interests. As Olive Banks wrote: 'certainly working-class women had their own sources of discontent and by and large these have appeared to be less a result of sex than of their class'.[93] Historians of Lancashire argued differently, stating that in Nelson 'the small female membership of the SDF, after 1904, began to drift into the local suffrage movement, the Nelson Textile Women's Suffrage Committee'.[94] This would have been a setback for the SDF had it not been possible to be a member of both organisations. Hannam and Hunt argued that 'most socialist women who participated in the debate could not see a real separation between their feminist and their socialist goals'.[95] An argument supported by the many joint actions that took place just before the war. The Joint Labour and Women's Suffrage Campaign toured Lancashire for a week in October 1913.[96] In some instances, this distinctive role for female activists in Lancashire was mirrored in the increasing participation of women in trade union affairs in places like Glossop, Blackburn, Oldham and Preston after 1910.[97] Women's histories have to recognize 'the complex ways in which labour women developed and negotiated their political identities'.[98] The Lancashire context, with its trade unions, well-defined base of Guilds and Cooperatives and its traditions of female economic independence, assisted in women's political participation but often in a host of organisations outside that of the SDF.

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[92] Joyce Kay, 'It Wasn't just Emily Davidson: Sport Suffrage and Society in Edwardian Britain', *The International Journal of the History of Sport,* 25:10, 2008, p. 1,347.
[93] Olive Banks, *Faces of Feminism* (London: Blackwell Press, 1986), p.5.
[94] P. Firth, 'Socialism and the origins of the Labour Party in Nelson', (unpublished MA, University of Manchester, 1975), p.20.
[95] Hannam and Hunt, *British Socialists*, p.121.
[96] *Cotton Factory Times*, 24 October 1913.
[97] Joseph White, *The Limits of Trade Union Militancy* (London: Greenwood Press, 1978), p.53.
[98] June Hannam, 'Women and Labour Politics', in *The Foundations of the British Labour Party* (Oxford: Routledge Press, 2009), p.175.

Yet, for many weavers, suffrage and socialism were always going to come second to day-to-day lifestyle needs and demands. A quick glance at the list of retail outlets in Blackburn in 1894 records an abundance of choice: 12 photographers, 12 cycle dealers, 103 fish and chip shops, 108 hairdressers and 201 dressmakers. 'A clear majority of families in many towns, had access to unadulterated foods and to a means of saving while they spent'.[99] Commercialisation, above subsistence levels, had clearly taken a grip on most Lancashire mill communities. Events such as WCG bazaars and tea evenings fulfilled parts of female activists' social and political engagements. A substantial number, 330 women, gathered for the first 'Tea' of the season at the Burnley WCG in September 1902.[100] The Rochdale WCG would ask politely that the town leaders give consideration to 'the claims of working women when a vacancy occurs on the Town Council'.[101] The Nelson Cooperative Jubilee in 1910 saw 15,000 people attend a large open-air procession, with a large gathering from the Nelson Suffrage Association.[102] However, these activist events need to be put in social context. The 330 women at the WCG pale into insignificance against the Amalgamated Weavers Association estimated 523,000 operatives inside the mills of Lancashire in 1901.[103] Moreover, as noted previously, open-air processions, especially taking place at the weekend, were attended by many workers as a staple part of their leisure itinerates and not as willing political supporters. 1,500 people joined in the great SDF unemployment demonstration in Burnley in 1905. The main speaker was Keir Hardie. Interestingly, and revealingly, the local press omitted to discuss the political context, keen more to explain that 'Keir Hardie looked both cool and democratic in a light-coloured jacket, a celular shirt and collar, and a panama hat'.[104] This focus on national leadership figures and personas was perhaps another sign that the nature of politics was changing and the SDF branches would need to change with it.

[99] Walton, *Lancashire a Social History*, p. 301
[100] *Burnley Gazette*, 27 September 1902.
[101] *Rochdale Observer*, 20 July 1918.
[102] *Burnley Gazette*, 10 August 1910.
[103] Edwin Hopwood, *A History of the Lancashire Cotton Industry and the Amalgamated Weavers Association* (AWA Publishing, 1968), p.197.
[104] *Burnley Express*, 5 July 1905.

Importantly, a re-occurring feature in the suffrage movement was the social influence of respectability and adherence to the law. Once again, Lancashire provides examples of the importance of moral propriety in the political environment. Support for the NUWSS or WSPU or any political organisation of this period, appears often to hinge on the contested value of respectability. Ms Kenney and Ms Pankhurst of the WSPU turned up at the Cooperative Hall, Rochdale on 5 November 1905 to give an address. The meeting was organised by the local ILP and the speech was entitled, 'Working women and politics'. However, after Ms Kenney had bragged of her recent eviction in Manchester and how 'never was a meeting better smashed'. The questions at the end focused on the fact that Ms Kenney had been accused of spitting.[105] Many workers were as equally concerned about 'respectable' behaviour as they were about political change and this facet of respectability reappeared throughout the suffrage campaign. Fred Maddison, Liberal MP for Burnley chastised the trade council when it protested against the treatment of suffragette prisoners. His critique was grounded in respectability: 'it is difficult to see how a person who elects to go to prison rather than pay a fine … can be called a political prisoner … they are just disorderly law breakers'.[106] When a letter box of the Burnley Insurance Committee was attacked in 1913, the Burnley branch of the NUWSS immediately passed and publicised their resolution that 'this meeting protests against the inference in the papers of Wednesday last that they – the only publicly organized section of the suffrage movement in Burnley – are in any way responsible for the reported outrage on the letter-box'.[107] In Rochdale, a meeting of the NUWSS reaffirmed its support for the cause but remarked on the actions of the militant WSPU as 'insane antics'.[108] Lady Rochdale speaking in Bury that same year responded to the WSPU by noting she 'deplored what the militants were doing'.[109]

[105] *Rochdale Observer*, 8 Nov, 1905.
[106] *Burnley Gazette*, 26 August 1908.
[107] *Burnley Express*, 15 March 1913.
[108] *Rochdale Observer*, 31 January 1914.
[109] *Ibid.*, 25 March 1914.

SDF women would have to adapt and adhere to this upstanding stance, which portrayed radicalism as undesirable even in an environment of fractious industrial relations. Taking a cursory look at the election year of 1906, the Burnley and district area is awash with mill disputes. At the start of the year, weavers' strikes were ongoing in Earby and Padiham, the disputes based on union recognition and bad material.[110] Towards the end of the year, similar actions were extant in Burnley at Stanley Mill and Stoneyholme Mill.[111] Yet, the disputes never become wholly violent or revolutionary. That same year the virulent anti-socialist David Holmes, leader of the Burnley Weavers Association died. 52 trade union collectors of the BWA instantly contributed to a memorial plaque and reports relayed how 'not a single person in the whole borough had a name that was more highly honoured'.[112] In politics that same year, Hyndman writhed and argued at the immobility of the socialist men in parliament stating that 'respectability is the curse of England's working class politics'.[113] Liberal winner of the Burnley general election, Fred Maddison, knew exactly how to detract from the socialists. In a news column that year, Maddison relayed how the ILP had started their local meetings by singing the hymn 'One step enough for me'. Maddison remarked that 'they would not get the SDF to sing that hymn … one step at a time was too much like the average person and they (SDF) liked to take a lot at a time'.[114] It was an argument that clearly placed the SDF beyond moderate and reasonable. Respectability attracted the majority of public support and local SDF women who could portray their socialism in a mode that mirrored that decorum would have more success than a radical who had been imprisoned or wished to reduce weavers' incomes by preventing their children from working.

The SDF were excluded from this mainstream of respectability either by their own political positioning, by vigorous press critique or by people's misconceived perceptions. To make matters worse, a growing Labour Party was slowly taking on the

[110] *Burnley Express*, 16 February 1906
[111] *Ibid.*, 29 December 1906
[112] *Ibid.*, 19 September 1906
[113] *Burnley Gazette,* 15 December 1906
[114] *Ibid.*, 9 February 1907

mantle of the moderate and reasonable voice of socialism. Simultaneously, Lancashire's particular industrial and social context revealed a large female workforce who were not attracted to radical socialist politics. David Shackleton, the Labour MP for Clitheroe, reflected this idea of respectable agitation. In February 1907, a six-month old fustian weavers' dispute at Hebden Bridge attracted the WSPU, Pankhurst, rowdy scenes and an attack on an employer's house. Shackleton turned up one week after Pankhurst and criticized the suffragists' actions. He counselled the strikers to remember that the most 'effective weapon for them to fight with was a good banking account'.[115] A point reinforced by Shackleton when he informed the meeting that his union had decided to take over the financial responsibility of the strike. Once again, trade union finance prevailed and influenced. Shackleton's lack of direct support for suffrage in his weavers' constituency did not go unnoticed. Mrs Allan Bright reminded readers of the local newspaper in 1908 that though she was proud to be a woman in Shackleton's constituency, when Shackleton was asked to ballot for a Women's Suffrage Bill, 'he replied that he was pledged to another Bill for men by whose votes he was sent to Parliament'.[116] The suffrage movement, like the SDF, was an array of differing individuals. It reminds that activists benefitted most by adhering to the dominant political culture of respectability. Ben Tillett summed up Shackleton scathingly as 'betrayers of the class that willingly supports them'.[117] Yet, despite this critique, Shackleton won three substantial election victories in his constituency. In 1902 he was elected unopposed. In 1906, he polled 12,035 votes giving him a massive 8,207 majority. In January 1910, he achieved a 6,727 majority.[118] The majority of male voters, many with wives employed as weavers in Clitheroe and Nelson, were content with the respectable approach to suffrage of Shackleton. The fact that female weavers complied with a levy of 6d per year to support Shackleton speaks volumes for the moderate nature of the Lancastrian workforce.[119] The women of the SDF would soon be surpassed by a party of the Left that had imbibed these respectable and moderate positions. Once again, SDF failure was not tied closely to a dogmatism or anti-trade

[115] *Ibid.*, 9 February 1907.
[116] *Clitheroe Advertiser and Times*, 28 February 1908.
[117] https://spartacus-educational.com/David_Shackleton, footnote 9.
[118] Roger Smalley, *Dissent*, (Nelson: Nelson ILP Land Society, 2018), pp. 69 and 72.
[119] Frank Bealey, 'The Northern Weavers, Independent Labour Representation and Clitheroe 1902', *The Manchester School,* Vol. 25, Issue 1, January 1957, p. 46

unionism it was just that a significant number of workers were contented with what was on offer from a moderate well-dressed Labour Party.

Activists in Action

The importance of individuals within the SDF movement and their extraordinary, sometimes arbitrary actions and responses, is a significant dynamic in understanding SDF localism and indeed the labour movement in general. Selina Cooper was one SDF agitator whose life of activism reveals to us much about the local SDF and the importance of singular actions. Cooper was born in Cornwall in 1864 and in 1875 Cooper's family made the journey up north where she found work as a half-time creeler in the cardroom at a Brierfield mill. Present at this time in the Nelson weaving district were three main social patterns of influence and development: immigration, paternalism and Methodism. Each would have its own particular effect on the development of this part of north east Lancashire. Jill Liddington outlined the influence of this rise in immigration and the distinct impact it would have on the area:

> Immigrants made towns like Nelson and Brierfield. The textile communities stretching up the valley from Burnley to Colne all came to boast the same kind of pioneering roughness of far-flung frontier towns. This abrasive newness, coupled with the scarcity of large-scale paternalistic mill owners, became grafted on to existing democratic traditions that flourished locally.[120]

The significance for Cooper was that her socialism would be influenced by and contained in this environment. Nelson was a place in flux, with new challenges and new opportunities, where some workers instigated the 'power and room' system (a form of self-employed weaving inside a hired space) and where a religion existed that encouraged obedience, thrift, respect and self-improvement. Cooper's socialism, like Irving's four miles up the road, would be influenced by a particular set of circumstances.

[120] Liddington, *Respectable Rebel*, p.34.

In July 1895, H. M. Hyndman was contesting the parliamentary seat of Burnley and the radical Reverend Leonard was lecturing in Brierfield on 'Darkest England'. National and local politics were combining to encourage Cooper to become active in politics. Cooper's entry into political life resulted from mill grievances. Initially, we know that domineering overlookers and unhygienic toilet conditions in the mill encouraged Cooper into action. Shortly thereafter, she joined the St John Ambulance, learned First Aid, and became acquainted with the leader of the Women's Cooperative Guild in Burnley, Mrs Brown. Cooper became more involved in local politics and began canvassing for the Brierfield United Labour Party Club, a local organisation of different socialist orientated supporters, which reflected the diversity of local politics. Local workers' representative Ben Smith won the election that year to Brierfield Council by six votes. Simultaneously, Cooper took her first courageous step of presenting her first lecture, appearing before the 70 member strong Nelson Mutual Improvement Society. In 1898, Cooper was instrumental in forming the Brierfield Women's Cooperative Guild. She became its president and the branch had grown to 50 members by 1900.[121] Her constant organisational undertakings were beginning to develop her for the future as she learned of the procedures of town committees and the nature of canvassing at local elections. In 1900, Cooper came into contact with cooperative guildswomen Mary Brown and the eccentric Lady Alice O'Hagan, who were both elected candidates to the Board of Guardians. In this sense, the Women's Cooperative Guild was instrumental in encouraging women to participate in local government and to create a pathway for women's voices to be heard. Such local details reveal to us the intricacy of how socialist women worked across many organisations, a facet often overlooked by general histories and a further argument for more local investigation. By 1 May 1900, Esther Roper had initiated a petition appeal on behalf of the North of England Society for Women's Suffrage in Lancashire. Cooper remembered how 'I took an active part in collecting signatures for the great petition…I went about with petition forms, visiting thousands of doors'.[122] In early 1901, the petition had received 23,359 signatures and Roper chose a group of fifteen female weavers, including Cooper, to present the

[121] Ibid., p.65.
[122] Ibid., p.103.

petition to Lancashire MPs in parliament on 18 March 1901. From the very beginning, one can note that many types of politics and organisations interacted in creating and developing female socialists. It would be a gross over simplification to interpret Cooper as a singular female SDF activist. From the start Cooper was an exception, a socialist, a labour unity canvasser, a guildswoman and a suffragette petitioner. Her history informs of the complex nature of female socialist activists and undermines the basic one party interpretation of national histories.

Freshly returned from her suffragette petition to parliament, Cooper was chosen, by both the local ILP and SDF branches, to run for election at the Board of Guardians. In Cooper they saw

> someone who could push forward their socialist policies. Equally important, they offered to pay her election costs and even her travel expenses to Burnley for the Guardians meetings. They were conscious that working people were hardly encouraged to stand for election, and that Boards were traditionally organized for the personal convenience of men with private incomes or their own businesses, not for the wives of Lomeshaye weavers.[123]

The *Colne and Nelson Times* had no doubts as to the inappropriate nature of Cooper's submission: 'women are, as a whole, too indifferent to what happens outside their domestic life to take too prominent part in public work'.[124] Ultimately, three men topped the poll, but, significantly, Cooper had clinched the fourth and last election place with 679 votes.[125] Within weeks, Cooper was attending the Burnley Board of Guardians meetings and realizing the nature of local politics. She understood that her former colleagues, Mrs Brown and Lady O'Hagan, who were Liberals, would not always vote in the same manner as her. She also met the recalcitrant SDF man Dan Irving and though often siding with him on issues, she did not wholly approve of his politics or his tactics. Cooper was more inclined to drift towards a more moderate political approach. 'Not only was she still the only working woman on the Board; she was also the only

[123] Ibid., p.110.
[124] *Colne and Nelson Times*, 15March 1901.
[125] Liddington, *Respectable Rebel*, p.111.

representative of the newer, more tolerant form of socialism that now flourished in Nelson'.[126] These early representations of Cooper's SDF mill town actions emphasise the individual nature of one female activist. Rarely, does Cooper's story make a reference to any SDF party instruction or directive. Not for the first time would SDF activism appear uncoordinated and unregulated, to the point where the usage of the term 'party' to describe Cooper's actions is inappropriate.

Cooper's socialism illustrates the interlinking connections of the different social and political organisations in Lancashire and how political issues at hand were given priority over party politics. At the 1904 local municipal elections in Nelson, Cooper's candidacy was proposed by the chairman of the LRC, William Rickard. On this occasion, Cooper ran for office alongside her good friend Harriette Beanland, a self-employed dressmaker. Both women agreed to run on a joint manifesto and the resulting final draft was a compromise. The manifesto, which had initially contained socialist slogans and references to workers taking into their own hands the administration of the Poor Law, was moderated by Beanland and 'much of the language of class conflict was firmly deleted'.[127] Of the 7,171 electors on the register only 2,720 voted. Selina Jane Cooper was victorious and top of the poll with 1,385 votes and Beanland was also successful coming third with 1,322.[128] The joint manifesto with Beanland shows that Cooper was prepared to compromise her political disposition when and if necessary.

The social knock-on effects of being a family member of a socialist or suffrage woman ought not be overlooked. Both Cooper's daughter and husband were affected by her activities. Cooper's daughter Mary was often bullied at school. Students pinned bits of paper to her with labels written upon them, 'suffragette' or 'socialist'. For husband Robert it was no easier. Liddington argues that by Edwardian standards, a woman demanding the vote somehow emasculated her husband. 'It undermined all the traditional notions of his rightful control over his wife. Lancastrian neighbours thought

[126] Ibid., p.118.
[127] Ibid., p.129.
[128] *Burnley Express*, 30 March 1904.

a man who sympathized with the cause for which his wife campaigned must be entirely soft'.[129] Robert was to compound the critique further by joining the Men's League for Women's Suffrage. These types of victimization are missed by national histories and should not be overlooked if we are to comprehend the life and difficulties of an SDF woman. The bullying of Cooper's daughter and husband are examples, often hidden, which help to explain why only a few SDF women managed to persevere and why Lancashire was such a difficult environment to convert.

The town of Nelson was described by Liddington as a 'frontier town'. Nelson was a small weaving town with a growing, newly arrived population. It possessed a very large and influential Methodist church and eventually a strong ILP which would gradually surpass the SDF in influence. This ILP existence would be a very important factor in persuading local activists as to which grouping to follow to achieve one's socialistic aims. The fact the Cooper did not oppose Shackleton in 1902, when Irving and other SDF activists were agitating against him, shows that Cooper had already chosen moderate reformist socialism before that of the SDF. The Nelson ILP party grew so strong that by 1907 the local branch was able to build a brand new socialist centre. Cooper, along with Katherine Bruce Glasier, were chosen to lay the foundation stones at an opening event on Saturday 27 July 1907. Nelson socialism developed around the ILP instead of the SDF but it was understandable, if not unavoidable, that Cooper would be active within both groupings. It is highly probable that if Cooper had grown up in Burnley she would have remained a staunch SDF member. The significance being that just like individuals, towns too were unique in their socialist interpretations and actions. A further argument that reminds that it is inaccurate to talk of only one party political interpretation of the SDF.

Though Cooper's opinions would alter over time, her socialism and feminism were very rarely at odds. In 1903, whilst Sarah Reddish and Esther Roper were crisscrossing the county addressing union branches, Cooper was doing likewise in the Nelson

[129] LIddington, *Respectable Rebel*, pp.153-154.

district. She was most active in canvassing female weavers at four separate meetings. The Nelson weavers agreed to ballot its members on women's suffrage being made 'a trade union question in the same way that labour representation has been made a trade union question'. 4,594 voted in favour of the motion in 1903, with only 881 in opposition.[130] Cooper, who was the first secretary of the Nelson and Colne NUWSS committee, approached the Women's Liberal Association and invited recently defeated political opponent, Sarah Thomas, to be the president of the local committee. Within a short space of time, many female weavers had joined the cause. Cooper then extended her influence even further and began to encourage members of the Women's Cooperative Guild to get involved in the suffrage campaign. 'The WCG helped make her [Cooper] name well-known locally, and acted as the springboard for much that she went on to do".[131] Some women at this point expressed a fear that a suffrage bill would only enfranchise wealthy women. In response, Cooper implemented a door-to-door canvass of a typical Nelson ward. Her results showed that nearly five hundred women in the ward would receive the vote, or that ninety-five percent of the new voters would be 'working women'. Often working alone, Cooper appears unrestricted and unheeded, utilizing several organisations to implement her opinions on issues. The volume of inter-organisational usage and the lack of recorded SDF assistance certainly suggest that Cooper's agitation was at times self-inspired rather than party driven. This is an important aspect for the understanding of the dynamic of SDF actions because it reminds that a graded interpretation of the party's history is required if we are to better understanding the SDF.

Another female agitator who created her own unique socialist space in the mill towns was Enid Stacy. Stacy's political engagement is worth analysis because she typified a key method of late nineteenth-century politicization, oratory command and propaganda, and importantly her activities raise questions about SDF strategies. Born in Bristol in 1868, Stacy's strongest contribution to the SDF was her speechmaking abilities. The ability to reach workers' audiences encountered three particular

[130] Ibid., p.139.
[131] Ibid., p.75.

challenges: the capacity to make oneself heard, sometimes outdoors and in poor weather conditions; the ability to engage and entertain a crowd; and the capacity to actually gather a crowd together to listen. Stacy had all three required components. One socialist veteran noted how 'as she drove the facts home one by one I could feel a change in the attitude of the people'.[132] Stacy was to find her favourite audiences 'especially at Nelson and Colne, Burnley and Rochdale'.[133] Stacy's propaganda was characterized by an excessive and demanding scheduling. In 1893, Enid Stacy addressed 122 meetings in 33 towns across Lancashire. She spoke at numerous locations: including Barrowford, Blackburn, Bolton, Burnley, Chorley, Colne, Littleborough, Rochdale and Salford.[134] Stacy turned up at Manchester's Boggart Hole Clough in 1895, where she spoke in favour of a cherished SDF topic, free speech and in July 1896, Stacy was back in action again representing both the ILP and the SDF at the Peace March in Hyde Park in London.

Clearly interlinked with the SDF, Stacy had breakfast tea with Hyndman in London in 1894 and acted as a vital bridge, linking socialist ideas to feminist ones. As John Bruce Glasier noted, 'Enid did a great deal to further the advent of women into politics'.[135] However, like Selina Cooper, Stacy promoted both the ILP and the SDF and often acted alone and without any noticeable party directives. Industrial disputes, women's issues and external national events, pull and sway Stacy into meetings after meetings, but at no point can one pinpoint a long-term plan or perceive a political strategy to focus and attain a long-term goal. This random orientation of socialists appears across the labour movement of this era in Lancashire with some noticeable frequency. Importantly, the attraction of workers to Stacy's meetings may have been more practical than ideological. As some historians have noted, 'it was not surprising that in this area, particularly Burnley, Enid's audiences were especially interested when she spoke on the subject of factory legislation'.[136] Speeches, couched in industrial rhetoric rather

[132] Angela Tuckett, 'Enid Stacy', *North West Labour History Bulletin*, no. 7, 1980/81, p. 47.
[133] Angela Tuckett, *Our Enid* (Manchester: Working Class Movement Library, 2016), p.58.
[134] Tuckett, 'Enid Stacey', p.43.
[135] Ibid., p.7.
[136] Tuckett, *Our Enid*, p.103.

than in party politics, illustrate Stacy's adaptation to local weavers' politics and reinforces the argument that matters at hand were more important to mill town workers than any socialist ideology.

A series of actions, letter exchanges and revelations, between Stacy and her socialist colleagues from 1891 to 1893 led to some bad press and associated the SDF with the highly controversial topic of free love. Angela Tuckett noted 'how gleefully the capitalist press made anti-socialist propaganda out of these quarrels…and there were broad hints of free love and immoral goings-on'.[137] In 1891, Katherine Conway moved in to live with Dan Irving and his wife Clara. A year later, Fabian organiser De Mattos wrote a series of emotional letters to Conway, including, abusive comments about Irving, which Conway failed to keep secret. Shortly thereafter, in 1892, Stacy, Conway and the Irvings relocated to the experimental socialist colony at Starnthwaite, Westmorland, an action interpreted by many as most unusual and contentious. The *Burnley Express* reported on the colony under the title 'Freaks and Fancies'. The reporter, Dick o Bob, noted how the colony was on its last legs, that payment to participants never rose above half-a-crown per week and that the colonists were degrading themselves for working for such poor terms. In Lancashire dialect, Dick O Bob summarised that 'aw could do wi' a lot o changes, but seein' wot aw do see aw prefer to be satisfied wi' th' ill aw hev rather to flyin'. [138] By April 1893, Irving inflamed matters within the socialist love triangle by now taking his turn to expose some of Conway's personal letters to Stacy. The SDF, a political party with a national executive and a political newspaper, failed to give a party lead and appeared contented to not interject, a reluctance that arguably did more damage than help.

In the SDF, the topic of free love found a host of responses and opinions. Harry Quelch discussed the topic with typical Marxist reference to economic dependency. S. Gardiner pointed out that she thought that what most working men wanted was

[137] Ibid., p. 50.
[138] *Burnley Express*, 15 April 1893

simply a slave and Robert Blatchford described free love as a 'succession of transient amours'.[139] This promiscuous intimation was never really very far away from the surface of discussion. In reality, in SDF media coverage wives were noted to be acquiescent, tolerant and domestic. J. Horsfall of Nelson SDF had a wife who was 'the self-sacrificing spirit of our comrade's partner in life, who has aided us materially by the encouragement and assistance she has given, and by a broad-viewed toleration in his home life'.[140] The SDF leadership saw free love as a vote-loser, but their activists in the field were less cautious enacting their own conceptions of socialism. The key feminist issue of the right of every woman to independent individual action, uncontrolled by men, was lost in the fear of association with promiscuity. As Robert. Roberts noted in *Ragged Schooling,* 'even to the lowest levels, in matters sexual, people strove to maintain a façade, for known nonconformity in sex could do more than anything to damage one's prestige'**.**[141] A few years later and the public scandal of leading SDF woman Dora Montefiore and bricklayer George Belt would incite more malicious gossip and sour relationships between socialist women, 'there is little evidence that Margaret MacDonald and Dora Montefiore were able to put behind them the Belt case of 1899'.[142] Sexual relations did not play a major part in SDF history but when the issue was raised there was no executive lead. Local party members were left to their own interpretations. In Lancashire, where 'a widespread strong attachment to sexual respectability' existed, mill town SDF branches worked within these very same party and county parameters.[143] This undoubtedly left SDF women often isolated in their own decisions. This example of national executive non-intervention was important because it reflected the federal nature of the party as led from London.

Another leading female socialist of the era was Alice Foley in Bolton. Though we must be conscious of Foley's position as a later socialist activist, Foley provides the study

[139] Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists*, p. 90-91.
[140] Ibid., p. 92.
[141] A. Davies & S. Fielding, *Workers' Worlds: Culture and Communities in Manchester and Salford 1880-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 62.
[142] Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women*, p.170.
[143] Walton, *Lancashire a Social History*, p. 304

with first-hand accounts of women weavers' experiences and preoccupations which national generalizations tend to miss. Of the local Socialist Sunday School (SSS) group, Foley noted 'we had a few odd cranks amongst us, but also some loveable oddities'.[144] Foley remembered some of her tutors and classes:

> We also had a handsome 'hammer man' who worked shifts at the local steel forge…he introduced us to purple passages from Keat's. There was also a dear little man, a phrenologist, who sometimes felt our bumps to indicate our individual mental or social propensities[145]

The SSS movement was a mishmash of community education, but in Bolton at least, the 'cranks and oddities' appeared to take up as much space as any future socialist revolution. However, conditions in the weaving sheds would be what motivated and aggrieved most women:

> Old sinks were receptacles for wet tea leaves and sodden newspapers; no towels were provided and toilets were dark, smelly and inadequate. Of social welfare or refinement there was not a hint. If we fell sick we merely took ourselves off to the factory yard, hoping that the cooler air might revive us, but if not, our partner might see us safely home. In this capacity of 'good samaritan' she also was penalized by loss of earnings whilst absent on such an errand of mercy. But most resented of all was the lack of human dignity accorded to our status as 'hands' [146]

Female weavers possessed a mill town culture shaped by an economic independence, which was impacted significantly by immediate mill conditions. In one sudden and unexpected moment of revolt, Foley and some fellow workers went to air a grievance to the mill boss:

> Pushed forward by my workmates I began to stammer out the substance of our complaint, but the manager, now too bad tempered and irritable to listen or argue, let forth a volley of abuse and ended by peremptorily ordering us back to

[144] Alice Foley, *A Bolton Childhood* (Manchester: Manchester University, Extra-Mural Department, 1973), p.69.
[145] Ibid., pp.68-69.
[146] Ibid., p.59.

> work under penalty of immediate dismissal … as a parting shot, the manager hurled after us, "An' I suppose next time, yo'll bi axin' mi to give yo' sofas fur t'lie on". We later christened him 'owd sofa' but in my heart I despised that bully [147]

That the unions rather than SDF socialists improved these immediate and dreadful work conditions would be of significance when garnering political support because it would be the trade unions and not the SDF who would and could be seen as the primary agency of change and support for the workers.

Foley's memories remind how other, more immediate concerns were part of a mill town culture which was more concerned with respectability and neighbourliness than politics. Several forms of leisure existed in and around Foley's life and none of these examples led her father, her family, or her neighbours nearer to socialism. A good income and pride in 'a hard day's work' were clearly factors that provided succour. Philip Snowden recalled how 'it is a reproach for a young married woman with only a house to follow … to stay away from the mill'.[148] A government inspector at the turn of the century could also note 'a high standard of life in Blackburn among textile operatives, comfortable houses and money to spend on excursions'.[149] Foley's environment, was for many mill town workers, one in which factory and leisure and not party politics, played a decisive role. It was a lifestyle that upheld the status quo, and though workers were at times prepared to become politically active to defend jobs and wages, they showed little inclination to overturn the capitalist system that socialists blamed for the existing social and industrial environment.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was another female SDF activist in Lancashire whose story reminds how socialists were often not united, that finances were vital and that workers were very often not interested in the message of the SDF. From a very early

[147] Ibid., p.60.
[148] Benenson, 'The Family Wage', p.78.
[149] Ibid., p.79.

age, Holdsworth would visit the Cooperative Society Library in Great Harwood and read avidly. It would not take Holdsworth long to formulate some thoughts about the weaving mills: 'Factory life has crushed the childhood, youth, maturity of millions of men and women. It has ruined the health of those who would have been comparatively strong but for the unremitted toil and the evil atmosphere'.[150] Whilst Holdsworth was growing up, SDF branches were set up in Blackburn and Burnley and she attended the Burnley SDF branch meetings with her father. Like many early socialists, she had links with various organisations of the Left, and was active in both the SDF and the ILP in Blackburn.[151] In particular, Holdsworth would involve herself in the educational debate of the period.

The focus on education as a panacea for socialists and middle-class reformers revealed two reoccurring themes of the period: internal in-fighting between the reformers and an unwillingness or incapacity on behalf of the workers to participate. In 1903, Albert Mansbridge developed an alternative form of university learning with the introduction of the Workers Educational Association (WEA). Yet again, Lancashire and its middle class had created an organisation to enhance workers lives. By October 1904, Holdsworth considered the WEA little more than a 'capitalistic clerical scheme for workers'[152] and she had no hesitation in confronting Mansbridge, accusing him of betraying the working class.[153] Like many other organisations of the period, the WEA was a complex, multi-layered body. At an individual level, SDF members attended courses or, like Rochdale SDF member T.W Price, taught WEA courses. Price taught Sociology and Economics.[154] When the WEA acknowledged some of its failings to teach ordinary workers in 1907, the SDF harangued the WEA, 'calling for the educational programme of the trades unions to be implemented as a publicly-controlled free and secular programme'.[155] A Joint Committee was formed by the WEA to design a

[150] *The Woman Worker*, 3 March, 1909.
[151] Smalley, *Breaking The Bonds of Capitalism*, p.13.
[152] *Cotton Factory Times*, 3 April 1914.
[153] Smalley, *Breaking The Bonds*, p.59.
[154] Gary Heywood-Everett, *Rochdale Pioneers* (Rochdale: CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 1988), p.43.
[155] Ibid., p.50.

workable model for workers' education; it consisted of seven university representatives and seven workers. Henry Adkins declared the Joint Committee 'seven wise and seven Pickwickianally foolish fellows'.[156] The effects of this education would be hotly disputed. Furthermore, the contradictory nature of SDF members' involvement, teaching, attending or critiquing, reminds that local politics was very rarely simple and one-sided. The SDF could be many different entities and the activists within it could play many different roles, therefore it is a misnomer to talk of one SDF approach or position.

Such was the diversity of contesting organisations that in Rochdale, in 1909, an open conflict broke out between the WEA and another workers' inspired initiative, the Central Labour College (CLC). Harold Kershaw, a former WEA student, returned to the town and set up a branch of the CLC. The WEA responded by deciding to continue its top lecturer, R. H. Tawney. By 1910, Kershaw was overseeing five classes weekly in Rochdale, Bacup, Bury and Preston.[157] Workers were inundated with educational classes for self-improvement. WEA courses of adult education could be seriously academic. Briercliffe WEA in 1913 offered a course on 'serious thinkers of the nineteenth century' emphasizing the work of Bentham and J.S. Mill. In Burnley in 1912, listed classes included, industrial history and economics (with studies of Ricardo and Adam Smith, though noticeably not Marx)'.[158] Effecting moral improvement and not revolutionary overthrow was the priority. Workers who could afford the fee, who could locate a baby-sitter or who would prefer education before a pint, a bet, or simply a good night's rest, were overwhelmed with economics, history and logic. However, what both the WEA and the CLC could never come to terms with was, as C.F.G Masterman noted in 1909, that 'the culture of socialism and the culture of everyday working class life expressed themselves in different languages'.[159] Crucially, though the Lancastrian activists may have connected better with workers than *Justice,* all too

[156] Ibid., p.52
[157] Ibid., p.203.
[158] P. Firth, 'Trade Unions in Power Loom Weaving in north east Lancashire 1890-1914', Nelson Library, Ref, Lib:M08, p.132.
[159] Chris Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture 1884-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p.184.

often the autodidacts lost touch with the workers in their desire to emulate the bourgeoise. At a time when the vast majority of workers left school before the age of eleven, Widdup in Burnley famously entitled his propaganda tour of Lancashire 'peregrinations of Lancashire'. Few would have understood. Perhaps just as important was the fact that the average worker-student '[did] not care two pence about the WEA and NCLC squabble'.[160] The response to the educational classes was not very large. Over a forty year period prior to 1948, only 111,351 students had enrolled.[161] Yet another socialist and middle-class attempt to improve the workers had failed. Education, a major SDF pillar or strategical tactic, was seen to be wanting.

Holdsworth was unbending in her belief that the WEA was disabling the labour movement's best minds. In an article entitled, 'Which Way In Education', Holdsworth poured scorn and wondered if 'university revolutionaries would have graciously condescended to sit at my feet'. Lavena Saltenstall argued in favour of the WEA and claimed that workers were not fooled so easily. Holdsworth was adamant, if education was not making revolutionaries it was not succeeding.[162] The debate was published in the *Cotton Factory Times*. Gary Heywood-Everett has argued that Holdsworth was not far wrong. 'The WEA/tutorial class movement was welcomed by the establishment as a bulwark against revolutions, a moderating influence and a form of social control. It helped to channel and reduce pressures and conflict, neutralize class antagonism and integrate the working class into British society – just like its 'partner' the Labour Party'.[163] If the only way to make a socialist revolution was by making revolutionaries then the SDF was losing recruits to the WEA, the pub, the football match and the close relationship, particular in the mill towns, between trade union activity and labour mobilisation. It was a relationship ingrained in a weavers' tradition and one which Walton argued was 'too boldly etched to be ignored'.[164]

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[160] Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life Of The British Working Class* (London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 272
[161] Ibid., p. 265
[162] *Cotton Factory Times*, 3 April 1914.
[163] Everett, *Rochdale Pioneers*, p.200.
[164] Walton, *Lancashire a Social History*, p. 165

The pioneer tutorial class of the WEA in 1908 had approximately 40 students with only four women. Amy Fozard was a member of the Clover Street Unitarian Church and a Sunday school teacher. Her father was a plumber and she had three sisters and three brothers. She worked as a dressmaker at home and was 'one of four such women who generally were expected to be in the home as supportive wives…not learning about the economics and politics of the world'.[165] A strong weavers' ethic existed in mill towns as to what roles women should partake in. 'Social mobility was possible through education but even children who were able at school, especially girls, often could get little support from their families'.[166] Another participant, Ethel Kershaw, had three sisters and three brothers and her father worked as an iron turner. Kershaw worked as an elementary school teacher. The third woman, Eleanor Redshaw, was also the member of a large family; she was a cotton operative with four brothers and two sisters. The final woman on the tutorial course was Fanny Taylor. Fanny presented literary lectures in Rochdale and was recorded as a 'working man's wife'.[167] All these women were local women, aged 25 or 26. Gary Heywood Everett labelled them all as 'lower middle class'.[168] They were from large families and all had a strenuous ambition to improve themselves. The proportion of women in WEA classes did rise from 16% in 1912-13 to 39% in 1917-18, although the First World War no doubt affected this statistic.[169] Their importance is really best presented in the obstacles they had to overcome. Munby wrote of the era that 'should any girl show a tendency to politics, or to ideas of her own, she is looked upon by the majority of women as a person who neglects doorsteps and home matters, and is therefore not fit to associate with their respectable daughters and sisters'.[170] What female weavers 'ought' to do would prevent many women from utilizing educational offers. An account from another female WEA student captures another obstacle to female weavers' improvement. She believed that studying Literature seemed trivial when she saw young children having

[165] Everett, *Rochdale Pioneers*, p.96.
[166] Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton*, p.56.
[167] Everett, *Rochdale Pioneers*, p.132.
[168] Ibid., p.156.
[169] Ibid., p.154.
[170] Ibid., p.155.

to go to work at 5.00am. 'Studying Shakespeare is all right for the chapel and for England's glory but when one considers the conditions of the workers it is not right to study such a thing'.[171] The very environment that the female weavers inhabited impeded women from learning. First, because it was difficult to find the time and energy to study, and second, because some women thought it morally wrong to spend time on oneself when others lived in more wretched conditions. Clearly, difficulties within adult education could be physical mental and moral. The prime political SDF strategy of utilizing education to convince the workers of the need for societal change was filled with pitfalls.

Another SDF educational initiative, Bebel House in London, highlighted trade union influence and SDF weakness. Financing, or the lack of it, would be decisive and support from interested workers, with the wherewithal to travel and live in London, would be dismal. Only two students were ever registered at the college and they were Lancastrians. Mary Howarth of the Bury Weavers Association and Alice Smith of the Oldham Cardroom Association. Once again, the financial might of Lancashire trade union organisation was reflected as was the particularly active strain of self-help that existed in Lancashire. As Howell has argued, the hearts and minds of textile union activists may never have been won over by the socialists, but their 'business unionism' produced permanent local officials 'in which visions of fundamental change had little place'.[172] As 1913 closed Bebel House had closed too, unable to attract workers and unable to pay its way. Mary Howarth went on to become a full-time official of the Women's Trade Union League and Alice Smith secured a job teaching adults in Oldham. Another scheme to educate workers had been unsuccessful, partly because workers were not interested or incapable and because money was needed to finance education. Not for the first time would the socialists be dogged by finances and the trade unions the only force within the labour movement that could afford to reach an objective.

[171] Ibid., p.157.
[172] Howell, *British Workers and the ILP*, p.57.

The education debate exposed three reoccurring problems in the SDF approach. A mill town culture existed that rejected education, political in-fighting abounded with trade unions playing a decisive financial and influential role and a gender culture existed in Lancashire that prescribed what women should and should not do. Lavena Saltonstall wrote in a contemporary magazine of the era that 'should any girl show a tendency to politics, or to ideas of her own, she is looked upon by the majority of women as a person who neglects doorsteps and home matters'.[173] Not all socialists thought the WEA a menace. Alice Foley, who would become a trade union administrator, eulogized about the effects of participation in the WEA. 'The various seminars were small but spirited; the tutors understanding and encouraging. On sunny days, in circles on the University terrace…we humans parleyed'.[174] The ideological points of deviation between Holdsworth and Foley appear endless and were repeated across the labour movement. In turn, the mill town workers themselves were not one unified mass but consisted of different social groupings with different priorities and self-interested leanings, which often placed industrial and individual concerns before politics. SDF women were formed and dependent upon the fractious nature of mill town circumstances and local political issues. Holdsworth remained a socialist but at different stages of her political development issues at hand were more important than the political party. This was a central tenet of the period and one which emphasises the diverse nature of activists within the SDF.

Other Platforms

Several other organisations would assist in providing space for women's political advancement, some would be detrimental to SDF women's advancement and some would be of assistance. The British Women's Temperance Association grew steadily during the late nineteenth century and by 1892 it could boast 577 branches and 45,000

[173] Rose, *The Intellectual Life*, p. 278
[174] Foley, *A Bolton Childhood*, p.91.

members.[175] Simultaneously, the Conservative Primrose League was established in 1883 and the Women's Liberal Federation in 1886. The fact that the Bolton Primrose League could claim 1,000 members in 1908 gives some indication of the strength of women in a party directly opposed to socialism.[176] In Edinburgh, in the summer of 1883, the first 'guilders' met and the initial aims of the Women's Cooperative Guild (WCG) were written. The editor of the *Co-operative News*, Samuel Bamford, gave over a column in his newspaper to the founder of the WCG, Ms Acland. The first published space was 'Woman's Corner', and that September Pennine towns Hebden Bridge and Rochdale recorded the first branches with 60 members and 14 members respectively.[177] 'The Guilds', as they were often called, were particularly popular in Lancashire because the co-operative network was expansive across the county and because the guilds helped to encourage women to get involved in activities outside their homes and not just in the churches or chapels. Unlike so many other counties, Lancashire had an already existing organisational network of socialization, which would assist many women to become more active. By 1889, the annual general meeting of the WCG could record 51 branches and 1,800 members.[178] Sarah Reddish of the Bolton Socialist Party provides another example of how socialist women worked across several organisations. In 1893, President of Burnley WCG, Mrs Ashworth and Sarah Reddish were tasked by the Board of Trade to investigate conditions of families working in the textile districts. Of the 6,500 questionnaires only 714 were returned and completed but information was correlated about the conditions of married, working female weavers with small children. The inquiry reported that of 165 cases of child minding, 39 children were left with grandparents, 24 with an elder sister, 70 with a neighbour and 32 were left alone.[179] Reddish was asked to give the keynote speech at the WCG annual conference in Burnley in 1896. Reddish urged the development and opening of more cooperative branch shops.[180] These circumstances highlight for us the local multiples involved in being a female socialist activist. It is quite incorrect to think

[175] Shiman, *Crusade Against Drink in Victorian England*, p. 185
[176] *Bolton Journal*, 22 April 1893
[177] Catherine Webb, *The Woman with the Basket: The History of the Women's Cooperative guild 1883-1927* (Rochdale: Cooperative wholesale Society Publishing, 1927), p.22.
[178] Ibid., p. 30.
[179] B J. Flinders, 'Sarah Reddish 1850-1928, A Pioneer Woman Worker', Bolton Archive, ref: B 920 RED, p.29.
[180] Webb, *The Woman with the Basket*, p.80.

of SDF activists being attached to and working for just one party and it is important to recognize that multiple organisations were utilised. The WCG paved the way to correlate social statistics and the Clarion organisation made Reddish operational in Clarion vans. Clearly, socialists could exert influence in politics along a number of different paths.

Both Reddish and Cooper would proceed with their socialist ideals in tandem with the more moderate and cooperative values of the Guilds. Local activists, influenced by the unique geographical and social context of Lancastrian weaving mills, were not as restrained as national bodies and this enabled activists to be flexible and adaptive. This factor meant that national directives could be paid lip service to or circumnavigated where and when a branch or individual thought necessitous. Local activists had their own pressing local political limitations. For Cooper it was the need to start her Guild with talks and events based on literary subjects. 'Cooper ensured that the Brierfield Guild proceeded cautiously, wary of frightening away any member by too radical a programme'.[181] Cooper's tactics worked and by 1900, the Brierfield Guild had 50 members. Yet Reddish too would have to carefully circumnavigate her own local difficulties. A very public opposition and town hall protest, in 1902, against money being spent on the coronation of Edward VII[182], required a considerable amount of political 'balance' if Reddish was not to ruin her 'respectable' reputation within the WCG. Both women ran for political office and both were eventually successful. Reddish was voted on to the Board of Guardians in Bolton in March 1905.[183]

In the first fifteen years of its existence, four annual WCG congresses were held in Lancashire; in Oldham, Rochdale, Burnley and Blackpool. In 1925, Lancashire headed the league table of financial grants, with 164 branches being supplied across the county in one year. Of the recorded members, Burnley clearly stands out with 60, compared to the 43 of Manchester in 1890, and 100 members as opposed to the big

[181] Liddington, *Respectable Rebel*, p.75.
[182] Flinders, 'Sarah Reddish', p.20.
[183] Ibid., p.22.

city's 102 in 1926.[184] The WCG was important for women in Lancashire because it was one of a few organisations outside the traditional arenas of church and temperance that offered women a forum and from these beginnings the SDF benefitted. The Guild offered working women the rare responsibility of presiding at meetings, speaking before large audiences and organizing agendas. Cooper and Reddish would go on to fully exploit their respectable foundations and utilize local branches of national organisations to try and improve the lot of the weavers. Unlike the national executive bodies, the local activist moulded and shaped, often without recourse, the message of socialism on the ground. The mill towns were proving a very fertile ground with many platforms that a SDF woman could utilize.

Another organisation that provided women with a political space, sometimes in competition to the SDF branches, was the Women's Labour League (WLL). Essentially an early women's section of the Labour Party, the WLL is of interest because it placed women's domestic issues on the political agenda. General histories have tended to simplify the League's input and effect, and have been dismissive of it as an inferior and subjugated arm of the Labour Party. Deborah Thom once described the WLL as 'the local paper-selling and tea-making arm of the Labour Representation Association'.[185] Yet this broad-spectrum analysis overlooks key issues. Initially, established as a recruiting and electioneering organisation in 1906, the League grew to eighty-six branches in 1910 and one hundred branches by 1918. [186] In Nelson, a meeting was held to consider opening a WLL branch in October 1909: 'At the Weaver's Institute. Mrs Spencer presided over a meagre attendance. An address was delivered by Mrs Dorothy Lenn, of Cardiff'.[187] Alongside five branches in Manchester, Burnley Nelson and Colne all had branches. It was no coincidence that the core of the WLL was based in Lancashire with 31 registered branches at the turn of the decade. Familiar faces ran these groups, Beanland in Nelson and Chew in Rochdale, and a Lancashire and

[184] Webb, *The Woman with the Basket*, p.198.
[185] Caroline Rowan, 'Women in the Labour Party', *Feminist Review*, 12:1, November 1982, p.76.
[186] Ibid., p.75.
[187] *Burnley Express*, 16 October 1909.

Cheshire conference was held in May 1910.[188] Lancastrian women were drawn to institutions because they had a strong local history of trade union organisation.

The beginning and ending of WLL branches was very much dependent upon the local labour community and particular local circumstances. Manchester Central ILP disregarded WLL Executive correspondence on several occasions. Not until 1909, when Sam Robinson wed fellow activist Annot Robinson, did the local ILP branch engage with the WLL. The Burnley WLL, established in 1910, lasted only one year before it 'severed connection' in 1911.[189] At the height of the SDF Women's Circles initiative one can only imagine how Dan Irving must have been manoeuvring energetically behind the scenes. At Nelson, the branch closed in 1913 when 'all of Selina Cooper's Nelson branch resigned the League'.[190] The WLL attraction was obstructed in north east Lancashire by the already existing SDF. National WLL organizer Dorothy Lenn toured the North West and was most despondent when she was accommodated by members of the SDF who 'were not very enthusiastic about the League and went out every evening'.[191] Collette even argued that 'it seems that the general tendency was for SDF women to limit themselves to that body'.[192] Though this assertion may well ring true, the same could not be said of the leadership. SDF members Margaret Bondfield and Charlotte Despard both joined the WLL and both spent brief periods on the WLL executive. It is not too far to suggest that female SDF leaders, always with an eye on ambition and promotion, would have held different agendas and been influenced by different forms of motivation to that of less ambitious, work-bound socialists and weavers. Yet again, the local helps nuance explanation of SDF actions.

In March 1904, the SDF Women's Circles enterprise was instigated by Dora Montefiore and although the groups would reach a peak of around thirty in mid-1909,

[188] Christine Collette, *For Labour and For Women: The Women's Labour League* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p.85
[189] Ibid., Appendix 2, pp.205-217.
[190] Ibid., p.75.
[191] Ibid., p.83.
[192] Ibid., p.69.

their significance lies in the promotion of another female SDF space.[193] Margaretta Hicks took over the Women's Education Committee (WEC) in 1910 and listed the difficulties that still lay in front of the circle groups: women's groups often lacked a place to meet, they had no money, they found it hard to attract speakers and the inability of working women to leave work to attend meetings was pragmatically and socially considerable. A notable nine out of the twenty-six circles were based in Lancashire.[194] As Benenson argued, the late nineteenth-century socialist revival spurred women's labour activism and Lancashire female cotton workers in particular crystallized their ideas: 'this was also true in Lancashire where the socialist and suffrage campaigns helped nurture a critical consciousness'.[195] Crucially, it may well have been a Lancastrian consciousness that focused on franchise and not revolution. In the end, the WEC never received sufficient commitment from the male national executive to oblige branches to form circles. The WEC complained in 1910 that SDF branches were failing to even reply to repeated requests for women nominees to committee vacancies.[196] In the end, the women's party political machinery never got into a strong enough position to challenge male assumptions and there exists little evidence that suggests that many local groups had any real desire to contest the status quo. If a challenge was going to be mounted, it was most likely to be local in origin and driven individually.

Conclusion

To understand SDF female activists better, their rich complexity of individual experiences has to be examined. As Alison Prentice suggested, 'perhaps only in the lives of single individuals is it possible to glimpse the complexity of motivation and experience that make up human history'.[197] Complementing this need for individual

[193] Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists*, p.230.
[194] Ibid., p.63.
[195] Benenson, 'The Family Wage', p.80.
[196] Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists*, p.237.
[197] Jane Martin, 'Mary Bridge Adams and Education Reform, 1890-1920: an ethics of care?', *Women's History Review*, 13:3, 2004, p.469.

investigation, June Hannam and Karen Hunt argued that during the period when the SDF women's circles were in existence only individual female strength and endurance, and not political organisations in themselves, would seriously challenge the male bias. Individualism is exactly what characterized mill town SDF women. Both Holdsworth and Cooper were self-determining and both appear often to take their own political decisions with little or no regard to a party policy or directives. Explaining to female weavers that progress lay in empowerment through the franchise was a central tenant in that process. As Benenson explained, 'spokeswomen were not typical female cotton workers – their greater degree of self-education, lower fertility, and political skills set them apart – nonetheless they referred convincingly to collective experiences and became prominent because of their female co-workers' mobilization'.[198]

SDF women in Lancashire would interpret the gospel of socialism according to their particular circumstances and utilise many pathways. Some would be successful. In 1898, Reddish was the Secretary of West ward ILP when fusion with the local SDF branch was achieved.[199] The North of England Society for Women's Suffrage Annual report for 1901 cited the weavers' unions of seven north east Lancashire mill towns, representing 100,000 members, as being most influential in 'instructing its committees to bring women's suffrage once more before the TUC'.[200] On several occasions, we can see the close-knit cooperation of mill town female socialists. Ester Roper and Mary Haslam appeared in Reddish's election support team in 1907.[201] The nature of the socialist and SDF engagement varied. Reddish promised if elected to 'see that houses are fit to live in, drains right, and streets kept clean'.[202] Selina Cooper, who was employed by the NUWSS from 1906, electioneered for candidates who supported votes for women at elections in Liverpool and North West Manchester.[203]

[198] Benenson, 'The Family Wage', pp.79-80.
[199] Flinders, 'Sarah Reddish', p.19.
[200] Benenson, 'The Family Wage', p.85.
[201] *Bolton Evening News*, 30 October 1907.
[202] *Bolton Evening News*, 31 October 1907.
[203] Liddington, *Respectable Rebel*, pp.187-195.

Holdsworth, who appears the most radical female Lancastrian, also appears the least successful in converting workers to the socialist cause. 'The genius from Great Harwood' rarely shirked a fight.[204] Her confidence was such that prior to the First World War she could call herself 'the conscience of the SDF' and pressed SDF members in Lancashire to demand their leaders denounced the WEA. In addition, Holdsworth's 'singular dedication' to socialism could and would sometimes isolate her. While Dora Montefiore at *Justice* would give advice about household management and Julia Dawson in the *Clarion* emphasized women's roles as homemakers, Holdsworth was busy censuring the organisers of the Women of All Nations exhibition at Olympia for providing a crèche for visiting mothers, an action that was 'conformists fulfilling a male-dominated role'.[205] Holdsworth constantly accused educational enterprises of diluting revolutionary tendencies. The political result being that, once again, the SDF could be labelled as unreasonable and was further alienated from mainstream politics. Practically, the SDF adherence to an educational approach to change was at odds with the Lancastrian weavers' environment where 'schooling should not be allowed to get in the way of more important things like spinning and weaving'.[206] Some Lancastrians even noted that 'it was immoral to stay at school when you could be working'.[207] As Roger Smalley noted, 'she [Holdsworth] was never comfortable toeing lines'. At times, a single-mindedness marked a difference too large between Holdsworth's ideals and ordinary female weavers.[208]

Though a mill town culture can be perceived in our studied towns it is a culture that contains contradictions. The mill towns themselves provided a kaleidoscope of incongruities. When the Secretary of the Trade Union League, May McArthur, visited the Weavers' Institute in Burnley in 1906, she informed the gathered weavers that 'the women and girls in Lancashire seemed to have more grit than women and girls in other parts of the country'.[209] Though flattering to deceive, McArthur was generalising to

[204] *Burnley Express*, 22 August 1908.
[205] Smalley, *Breaking The Bonds*, p.29.
[206] Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton*, p.56.
[207] Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p.36.
[208] Smalley, *Breaking the Bonds*, p.28.
[209] *Burnley Express*, 12 December 1906.

curry favour but her singular approach overlooked the women weavers' different status and ambitions. A division in status and economic buoyancy existed amongst themselves. Some mill town women earned five shillings a week at the age of thirteen and got six pence back from mum, or had in-laws living in the same house. Uncle Harry 'was very partial to a drop of beer and would send the children out with 1/4d to the Junction Pub'.[210] Such lives were not missionary in nature but driven by a desire to earn and endure. Some women in Manchester 'claimed one day in the week when the public-houses are their domain'. Contemporary commentators frowning on the female weavers' selfish pursuit of materialism, advising them 'to give up going to the mill and devote herself to the bearing and rearing of children would entail the abandonment of all this – of her social pleasures'.[211] On the whole, mill town women were in a different financial position to many other women throughout the country but there were also internal nuanced variations. This coloured their standing in the community and their political proclivities. When the industry was not in a cyclical depression, the customary practice on pay day was that 'husbands handed over a complete wage packet to wives who then gave them their spending brass'.[212] The large number of women working in the mills may well have given them a spiritual independence but it did not necessarily unite them behind any one political party.

The female SDF story in the mill towns is one dominated by an assortment of different social and political groupings. There was not one SDF, not one working class and not one suffrage assembly. It is also a tale of propriety, immediacy, the mill and increasing consumerism. Intrinsically, it is a history of how women's involvement requires further investigation. A weaver could sign a petition and attend a meeting in the open-air, but they would always be held back by the immediacy of financial demands, a trip to the theatre or the firm grip of respectability. An increased involvement of female activists did not always incorporate ordinary working weavers. Cooper and Holdsworth were vigorous exceptions who reflect well a socialist divide. Cooper was more successful in

[210] Alice Woodhead, 'Do You Remember', Living History Workshop, Rochdale College of Adult Education, 1974, Ref BO2, p. 22
[211] Ibid., pp. 44-45.
[212] Parratt, 'Little Means or Time', p. 36.

her moderation and exploits across various organisations, Holdsworth with little to show in the radical margin: 'the difficulty Ethel found in giving unqualified support to the recognised voices of the Left isolated her from the political mainstream'.[213] Despite national history's tendency to generalise, SDF women remind that the real picture was unique to each activist, to each town and to each mill. As *Justice* recognized in 1907, the women's groups were 'training grounds'.[214] What it did not realize, is that the groups were investing in socialist propaganda, but for a more long-term opportunist, the success of the next workers party to come. After the war, Holdsworth, like so many other SDF members, would join the Labour Party.

[213] Smalley, *Breaking The Bonds*, p. 59
[214] *Justice*, 8 June 1907.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The historiography of the SDF creates an image of the Social Democratic Federation as one homogenous political party. A political grouping led by H. M. Hyndman that made decisions at party conference and in London, which were characterized by intransigence, a lack of cooperation, political naivety and a lack of success. In contrast to these assertions, this study of the party in Lancashire has discovered that it was anything but homogenous. The SDF in Lancashire was a series of island branches led by self-regulating Crusoes, which resulted in an array of contradictions. From its first foray into a Blackburn strike in 1884 to its transformation into the BSP in Salford in 1911, the party was a complex arrangement of different thoughts and different individuals, which reflected a multitude of socialisms. Often more similar than different to their ILP colleagues, the SDF activists of Lancashire mill towns responded primarily to first-hand local political issues and seldom expressed forms of dogmatic socialist ideology. Importantly, though, incessant branch propaganda from the market squares to the mill yards would not be entirely futile. As the Labour Party grew and the SDF transformed into another entity, SDF activists converted allegiances to big brother Labour or joined the Communist Party of Great Britain. The struggles that the SDF branches engaged in reflected both the nature of the party, the individuals involved and the specific context of Lancashire.

The Lancastrian mill town environment would both help shape and hinder the socialists. Lancashire weavers were, on the whole, attached to a Protestant work ethic with an overriding concern for respectability. As society developed and infrastructure provided railways and goods for material consumption, so weavers' expectations grew. With a small excess of wages, weavers began to increase their 'rights'. Alongside the old embedded 'right to drink' one could now add a host of other rights, from hobbies to watching football. The revolutionary consciousness that the SDF desired was

weakened and prohibited by sport, the music hall and the pub. As Stedman Jones argued, 'these institutions were inevitably socially conservative and politically disabling.[1] The life raft that was the SDF was simply swept aside by the tsunami of a mass commercial leisure industry. Understanding that the weavers' culture was central to a particular workers' approach to politics in Lancashire helps bridge the fissure the SDF could not. As Eric Hobsbawn noted, the collective consciousness of the workers was really defined as a deep-rooted feeling of 'us' and 'them'. Consisting of a sense of separateness and a moral code of fairness, weavers' culture could be said to have been simply an alternative to bourgeois society, and more specifically simply 'seeking to work and adapt within it (existing society), but not to overthrow it'.[2] The British workingmen and women had evolved. He was thought to be an upstanding, no-nonsense independent individual, one who encompassed 'a bloody-minded and ill-disciplined workforce', which 'became as legitimate as the political assertions of any other class and as difficult to deny'.[3] At one SDF unemployment meeting in Burnley in 1908, a heckler summarized the prevalent and practical response of many to social revolution: 'What's the use of having a political meeting? Tell us where to get some dinner and have done with it'.[4]

Workers' interest in sport and commercial leisure and their lack of interest in socialist politics would strike a noticeable similarity for both the SDF and Labour Party. Declan McHugh has argued that, just like the SDF, the Labour Party would be confronted with the issue of socialization and leisure. Christopher Howard noted that attempts to mix people and pleasure in Lancashire were halted when 'Labour clubs became drinking dens, local newspapers failed and efforts to cater for working-class recreational habits – football, darts and tennis – proved beyond the party's ability'.[5] The alternative socialist culture, which both parties attempted to spread amongst workers, suffered

[1] Stephen G. Jones, *Sport and Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p.24.
[2] Ibid., p.24.
[3] Ross McKibbin, 'Why Was There No Marxism in Great Britain', *The English Historical Review*, 99:39 April 1984, p. 319
[4] Geoffrey Trodd, 'Political Change and the Working-Class in Blackburn and Burnley, 1880-1914', (unpublished PhD, University of Lancaster, 1978), p.279.
[5] Declan Mc Hugh, *Labour in the City* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 82

from the same problem. The workers did not share the same values or interests as the socialist activists who 'were actually quite unlike the people they sought to represent'.[6] Labour activist Wright Robinson wrote despairingly about the lack of interest in the Labour Party in Manchester: 'the public house, the theatre, race course, football ground, cinema, music hall, sport, flourish without teaching us that the emotions and interests these represent, are older, deeper, and more enduring than government's or forms of government'.[7] Joseph Clayton added more, he argued that Ramsay MacDonald and his colleagues had perceived the workers' disinterest and therefore had decided to remodel Labour as a social reformist party, in part because the workers had 'other interests – family affairs, football, cricket, betting and gambling; above all the business of earning a living'.[8]

A key factor of this weavers' culture and an explanation for political success in Lancashire was the particular mill town relationship between some mill owners and many weavers, a further understanding of a culture embedded in localism more than national politics. Sir Harry Hornby of Blackburn was an example of a man who had perfected this understanding. A well-functioning paternalist, Hornby was 'remarkable because of the degree to which he relied upon patriarchal claims rather than political activity'.[9] Snowden was quite correct when he noted that 'Toryism had become Hornybism'.[10] In twenty-four years of parliamentary representation, Hornby never made a single speech in the House of Commons, preferring to satisfy his constituents in his own parochial way. It was a well-known fact that Sir Harry would walk around Blackburn town with his pockets filled with sweets for the children.[11] The many forms of common experience of working men and women was where real popular politics was located. Mill industrialist, Hornby of Blackburn and not the SDF, had found a tap into this common experience.

[6] Ibid., p. 91
[7] Ibid., p. 86
[8] Ibid., p. 119
[9] P.F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p.224.
[10] Ibid., p.312.
[11] Ibid., p.224.

Into this mill town culture of immediacy and social conservatism the island nature of the Lancashire branches were thrust. The mill town branches of the SDF were often small, unique and led by one or two stalwart members who were persistent and often unrestricted. These islands of socialism were characterized by several reoccurring features. They were usually well organised and autonomous; a feature that provided a great deal of local independence but simultaneously lacked an overall party political strategy. All the focused branches of this study had their own newspaper and Irving organized the local Burnley branch into an effective political machine.[12] In direct contradiction, by 1906 one can perceive other effects of decentralisation. A new SDF branch was established in North-East Manchester and in the next three years, five more branches sprung up at Stretford, Gorton, Longsight, Ardwick, and Harpurhey. Yet, 'despite the existence of ten branches in the district there developed little in the way of effective co-ordination, each branch acting as it felt fit according to its own interpretation of policy and circumstances'.[13] The autonomous organisation of the SDF Lancashire branches led to unrestricted agency and often placed decision-making in the hands of local activists. Like a double-edged sword, branch autonomy could be a local strength but a national weakness.

Closely related to the self-governing nature of the SDF islands was the rogue nature of individual agency. Membership of the Lancashire branches covered a wide social range, though with a minority of unskilled workers.[14] By 1894, the Burnley SDF branch could claim that the circulation of the *Burnley Socialist and North East Lancashire News* was 3,000.[15] Trodd has claimed that 'members enthusiastically used arguments from Louis Blanc and Fourier in letters to the local paper and interrupted Liberal speakers with quotes from Marx and Owen'.[16] Irving, Sparling and Widdup of Burnley SDF do

[12] Jeffrey Hill, 'Social Democracy and the Labour Movement: The SDF in Lancashire', *North West Labour History*, Vol. 8, 1982, p. 50.
[13] Alan J. Kidd, 'The Social Democratic Federation and Popular Agitation Amongst the Unemployed in Edwardian Manchester', *International Review of Social History*, 29:3, 1984, p.341.
[14] Trodd, 'Political change', See Table 40, p.337.
[15] Ibid., p.331.
[16] Ibid., p.332.

not fit this interpretation. Though self-taught, they tended to use rhetoric, which was simple and straightforward and one that reflected an understanding of their audience. They also, more often than not, were perceived as too radical or unreasonable. Irving's recalcitrant personality in Burnley, Smith's arrest in Manchester and Holdsworth's intractable nature in dispute with reformist socialists, reflect single-minded people who did not attract many 'ordinary' workers votes. Importantly, too many SDF activists blamed workers for their ignorance, or just as crucially, they failed to interact with the majority of workers who were preoccupied by commercial and sporting issues and an adherence to respectability. This individual agency was so pronounced in Lancashire that it questions the influence of party and suggests that the 'islands' were, at times, more dependent upon individual than executive input. Examples of singular agency outside the county suggest that the phenomenon was not restricted to the red rose county. Rose Jarvis was a singular driving force in the Northampton branch, George Lansbury choreographed his Bow and Bromley branch 'like revitalist gatherings'.[17] J.R. Widdup would be a key factor in the establishment of branches in Keighley and Dewsbury: 'his activities demonstrate the impact that one man could have on a locality'.[18] The importance of local individual agency is another facet of SDF history missed by national histories.

Nevertheless, contrary to the prescribed national view of SDF failure, mill town SDF branches were engaged in the singularity of politics and could win political battles sowing socialist seeds for the future. The SDF were certainly more active in trade union organisation than hitherto realized. The Lancashire Piecers' Association was one such SDF initiative in the early 1890s, which unionised non-skilled workers.[19] In June 1896, the SDF began a campaign in Burnley on behalf of the workers to acquire land at Towneley Hall and eventually the council purchased the estate.[20] In May 1898, the party organized a conference of Socialist School Board Members at the ILP club at 53

[17] David James, *Class and Politics in a Northern Industrial Town. Keighley 1880-1914* (Keele: Ryburn Publishing, 1995), p. 157
[18] Martin Crick, *The History of the SDF* (Keele: Ryburn Publishing, 1994), p. 132
[19] Trevor Griffiths, *The Lancashire Working Classes, 1880-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), p. 65
[20] *Justice*, 27 June 1896.

Booth Street in South Manchester. In Nelson, SDF members Ernest Johnson and John Pickover utilised the Nelson Ratepayers Association, from 1889 to 1893, to defend workers' rights.[21] SDF members in Lancashire were contributing to a local climate of participatory socialist action. Collaboration with the ILP and positions of official administration within weavers' unions revealed a Lancastrian context of cross-institutional administration that assisted in growth. The nature of the Lancastrian struggle revealed that activists were far from the negative stereotype of general histories. The lack of reference to Marxism by Lancastrian SDF activists is tellingly stark. It is an interpretation that is detached from the hitherto accepted historiography of SDF intransigence.

The extent of SDF influence is difficult to gauge but a few clues give us guidance. A tangible piece of evidence is the large volume of SDF members who would migrate into the Labour Party as socialist history proceeded. In Manchester, the developing District Labour Party organisations recruited former SDF men A.A. Purcell and Joe Toole.[22] In north east Lancashire there was no shortage of new Labour men. SDF leader Dan Irving became Labour MP for Burnley in 1918 and SDF stalwart, Tom Hurley of Blackburn also crossed the divide, being elected to the newly formed trades council and Labour Party organisation as its President in 1923.[23] Even the truculent and radical Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had joined the Labour Party by 1927.[24] It is inconceivable that this volume of SDF members joining Labour would not have had some impact on the political focus and direction of the party. More recently, Roger Smalley perceptively noted that the Labour Party's success in north east Lancashire was 'clearly based on the preparatory work of their predecessors in moving working-class sentiment away

[21] P. Firth, 'Socialism and the Origins of the Labour Party in Nelson 1890-1906', (unpublished MA, University of Manchester, 1975), Nelson Library, ref, P16, p. 29.
[22] McHugh, *Labour in the City*, p.75.
[23] *Blackburn Times*, 28 October 1933
[24] Roger Smalley, *Breaking the Bonds of Capitalism* (Lancaster: North West Regional Studies, 2014), p. 140

from Liberalism and towards a more inclusive political vision which embraced precisely the sort of dissent the Nelson Labour Party represented'.[25]

However, the overwhelming message of this thesis is the complex nature of early twentieth-century labour history. The Lancastrian branches of the SDF were fraught with contradictions and were very different representations from the utterances of Hyndman and Quelch. At best, the Lancashire branches were a myriad of opinions and on occasion a distinct group who were 'generally' inclined to cooperation. The Lancashire branches tended to favour support of fusion with the ILP and later urged an alignment with the Labour Party. Fusion occurred between Bolton ILP and SDF at a meeting in the Palatine Building in 1898.[26] Irish protagonist James Connolly was invited to speak at the Salford SDF branch in 1894 and 1902, his cost shared by the South Salford SDF and West Salford ILP.[27] In Bolton in 1906, socialists offered Ramsay Macdonald 'heartfelt congratulations' on his election victory.[28] Despite the leadership's rhetoric and a SDF conference vote of 130-30 against affiliation with the Labour Party in 1908, SDF Lancastrians were still inclined to offer support to big brother 'Labour.[29]

Yet, concurrently, SDF advancement was impeded by a specific Lancashire context which impacted on activists and weavers alike. Mill towns contained weavers who could be apathetic, contented and distracted. It was an environment in which activists had a flawed understanding of workers' preferences and implemented weak political strategies. Irving's journey into the Labour Party in many ways supports the latter assertion. At Irving's national election victory speech of 1918, Irving asked rhetorically 'how was it possible to imagine that… people… would go on as in the past'. On two

[25] Roger Smalley, *Dissent, A Radical History of the Clitheroe Parliamentary Constituency* (Nelson: ILP Land Society, 2018), p.139.
[26] B.J. Flanders, 'Sarah Reddish 1850-1928, A pioneer Woman Worker', Bolton Archive Ref, B920RED, p.19.
[27] Dick Davies, 'Sectarian Socialists: A case Study of the South Salford Branch of the SDF 1884-1920', (unpublished MA, University of Manchester, 1998), p.14.
[28] Labour History Archive, Manchester, LRC 31/54.
[29] Crick, *The History of The Social Democratic Federation*, p.187.

more occasions Irving repeated how 'he was at a loss to understand' the weavers.[30] At this momentous watershed of his political career, Irving could still not conceal his frustration. Irving and his comrades could never fully understand the mill town culture they so desperately wanted to represent. In contrast, almost, imperceptibly and unwittingly, thirty years of fighting for the cause had created alliances across a broad spectrum of labour groupings. Irving had manoeuvred himself across the political ocean in such a way that the Labour Party could consider him, if not totally reliable, close enough to their ideology for selection. Irving had amassed a credible amount of respect, so much so that 15,271 or 41.9 per cent of the electorate returned him to parliament. Without too much hesitation one can argue that the Labour Party had benefitted from Irving's years of socialist agitation, and in turn, Irving had finally succeeded when the Labour Party had cloaked socialism in a much more suitable, respectable-looking, set of clothes.

The Lancastrians' choice of political strategies did little to assist them. An electioneering policy to 'fight the good fight' and a strategy of 'duality' reflects a political party with very few alternatives. Attacking the half-time system of child employment and pursuing education as the panacea against capitalism produced very few recruits in a weavers' environment. The former impacted directly and negatively on livelihoods and the latter was viewed as a subject of little direct value in the mill. In addition, the mill branches' engagement in the battle for the unemployed and for freedom of speech, misunderstood the reaction of the majority of workers, provided little opportunities for political advancement and provided the press with a weapon of scorn which marginalised the party. Women's engagement in the mill towns reinforces the complex nature of local history and the importance of individuality. 'Ordinary' women weavers and SDF activists were two very distinctive groupings. The temperate success of moderate Cooper juxtaposed with the abysmal realisation of radical Holdsworth, emphasises the importance of one utilising established organisational bodies and the other flailing in inflammatory discourse and disapproval.

[30] *Burnley Express*, 15 January 1919.

This local investigation reinforces the argument that general histories are often incomplete and that the local reveals a greater sophistication of historical interpretation. The federation of SDF islands reminds of the intricacy and personal nature of politics. It reminds of the huge importance of the social environment and it reminds of the large, often hidden, impact that socialisation and leisure had on people's lives. A recognition that the SDF, Lancashire, suffrage and the workers are not singular entities, but a countless number of interconnected causes and effects, is a large step in the requirement for more local studies and a greater understanding of labour politics in twentieth-century history.

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LP/LRC/31/54 J Duggan Secretary Bolton Socialist Party

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