

**THE FABIAN SOCIETY: ITS INFLUENCE AND  
IMPACT UPON ENGLISH POLITICAL,  
SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC  
LEGISLATION  
1884-1918**

**AN ABSTRACT OF  
A THESIS  
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**by  
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The Fabian Society did not develop a new philosophic or economic theory; nor did they provide a theoretical basis for Socialism. In fact, Socialism would not have become a movement if it had been based exclusively on Fabian mentality and tactics. But, then, the Fabians realized that it would have been ridiculous for a handful of intellectuals to aspire to power, rather than to influence. They preferred to adapt Socialism to British nature and tradition. They naively had a strong tendency to over-rate human nature by believing that the "spirit of service" could become the ruling desire of man generally, and that this "spirit" would permeate all classes.

The Fabians were basically reformers and they aimed at helping in a fundamental reconstruction of society which, in the end, was to make economic care a public affair. In this they were successful. By their extensive research and fact-finding, they helped to support emotion and popular feeling with a factual basis. They realized that mass appeal was a different art from research and education. It can also be said that they influenced the climate of thought of the higher ranks of public service by their intellectual brilliance and factual content of their arguments. But their most marked success was in dealing with specific problems and as popularizers of social reform.

While the Fabians will be treated by many in the long-view of history as a "mere intellectual lobby," it does seem that this label is somewhat unfair. Although England was not changed dramatically solely by Fabian endeavours, the Fabians in their small scope offered a valuable contribution. While their proposals for reform were always written with a collective bias, it is impossible to ignore their mountainous reports and investigative research which must precede any reform. This information was available to all, and their type of work was indispensable to other Socialist and Labour groups. That the Fabians undertook such painstaking study was in itself important.

The Fabian Society included in its ranks some of the most interesting and brilliant men and women of their century, whose books are still being read and appreciated. The works of George Bernard Shaw, Sidney Webb, Graham Wallis, and H. G. Wells have stood the test of time, while the writings of the members of the Social Democratic Federation and the Independent Labour Party have all but disappeared.

Fortunately, some Fabians did live to see many of the items of their programme made into law in subsequent years. Such achievements would have been unlikely without their intensity and tenacity of purpose.