

5

Reformers and Revolutionaries

Almost from the start of their residence in England, the Fels maintained a busy social life, the center being Elmwood, their home in the country at Bickley in Kent. "I have been out in the garden feasting on the flowers," Mary Fels wrote Anna Barnes in 1907.

The wall-flowers are in their glory now. The tulips are past their prime but beautiful still. The vases look lovely full of them in all colors. I love Elmwood more than ever before. I go about the place more than heretofore. We read aloud walking slowly up and down when it is not warm enough to sit outside. I wish you could see the conservatory now; it is growing into a sort of fairyland. The fig trees (bearing figs) are very effective against the white wall. The heliotrope covers the middle wall almost to the top. There are large beautiful hanging baskets of the pretty trailing things which you told us to get. Charles has many cuttings in the greenhouse getting ready for more baskets and for the vases on the terrace. The nasturtiums have been trained to run across the ceiling of the conservatory and drop down here and there between the baskets. You can see it all, can't you?

And then she concluded:

And can you see us sitting there and loving it, but needing you to make us really happy in it? Oh, dear Anna, I say so much about it, yet never tell you all our longing.

Anna and Earl Barnes had returned to the United States the year before, where they took a house in Montclair, New Jersey, so that Earl Barnes might work with Edward Howard Griggs at university-extension lecturing. The Barnes named their third child Joseph Fels, prompting Fels to write:

Dear little boy, you've got my name as part of yours. You're beginning its use. I've got a considerable distance on the way to finishing with it, so take care that you are good to Joseph and love people.

Mary and Joe were shocked in the fall of 1907 when they were belatedly told of the marriage between Walter Coates and Miss Eleanor Kessler of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, which had taken place on August 14, 1907, while they were in the United States. Eleanor, a professional singer of German *lieder*, and her sister Mary had stayed at Elmwood during the preceding summer of 1906, and Eleanor had moved in again in June 1907. Walter kept the Fels in the dark about his marriage, however, until the middle of September, two weeks after their return to England, and Mary's anguished reaction continued for months afterward. "That they married as they did was senseless and brutal. Joe and I measure the brutality by our own suffering through it, and so we probably see it out of all proportion to itself," she wrote to George Lansbury in December while preparing to depart again for America.

We cannot understand how *he* could do it save through something not himself; and so, in our bitterness, we blame the woman, and we think ill of the bond between them. So you see how what we say may be traced back to bitterness on our part. You will remember this, won't you, and thereby put out of your mind what we have said. The warrant for Walter is in my heart, in the depths and unfailingness of my love for him. It is in my mind as well, in the memory of all he proved himself these twelve years past.

"We are just a little uncertain as to just how we'll fit into the new lives of the young people," Fels wrote to Lansbury from the *Mauretania* on their return voyage in January 1908. Whether Joe and Mary ever learned that George Lansbury himself had served officially as a witness to the wedding is doubtful. The newlyweds had feared Mary's displeasure, and with justification. Walter Coates tried to make amends, but things were never again quite the same for him at Elmwood. "It's home still and good to come back, even if only for a day," he wrote.¹

Guests came to Elmwood for one day or remained longer. H. G. Wells' "More please!" in the *Visitors' Book*, together with Israel Zangwill's "Don't agree with the raven!" seemed to express their general sentiments. "The hostess kindness itself, the host a benevolent tyrant," Fanny Stepniak wrote. "Still one thrives well under such a regime," she conceded. Mary Fels' avant-gardism distressed some. "We bore Madame's cigarettes," C. H. Grinling revealed after he and his wife spent September's first weekend there in 1907, "but we buried the cigars." Once at the Fels' dining table, that stern abstemiousness so often found among Great Britain's and Ireland's socialists showed itself. "I remember one occasion when Keir Hardie, Jim Larkin, Mrs.

Hardie, myself, and others had supper with him," George Lansbury recalled.

Some trifle, nicely flavoured with wine, was served. Most of the guests were total abstainers, but the only one who refused the trifle with the wickedness in it was Jim Larkin. This incident enabled me to understand the secret of Jim's strength. He was never afraid of standing alone.

Visitors were made welcome even when Mr. and Mrs. Fels were away. "Two beautiful weeks—*eighteen* puddings!" Emma Goddard of Vineland, New Jersey, exclaimed. "Nothing lacking but Master & Mistress," her husband Henry added. The Goddards were friends of Joe's brother Maurice. Francis Korbay agreed with them: "To go to Rome and not see the Pope is wrong, but to come to Elmwood, enjoying there 3 days' delightful hospitality during the absence of the kind host and hostess, is quite preposterous, and still I had a jolly good time." So did George and Bessie Lansbury and eight of their children for ten days during May 1908. "We have all had a real holiday without any drawbacks," Mr. Lansbury affirmed, while little Eric George, his youngest, scrawled in agreement, "I'se had a lubly time."²

Efrem Zimbalist also learned to love Elmwood after Walter and Eleanor Coates befriended him. The young Russian violinist turned up to stay with Joseph and Mary Fels early in June 1908, and Mary was soon doting on him like a favorite son, much as she once had on Walter Coates. In describing to Earl Barnes her purchase of two paintings, Mary wrote: "It was at a sale, and my boy Zimbalist was there with me to bid for me in his dear broken English."

"I came to spend a week-end and remained many years," the famed virtuoso wrote later. He used the Fels' new home in London at 10, Cornwall Terrace, Regent's Park, N.W., for over two years as headquarters for his concert tours, and Joseph and Mary once accompanied him on a series of engagements in Scandinavia and Holland, although Fels himself had no profound understanding nor any appreciation of fine music—even though he had long ago advised the adolescent Mary Fels to learn music, since it was "the most essential part of education and the most civilizing." He was, however, observed more than once to whistle his shrill approval of Zimbalist's performances.

Zimbalist had left Russia just at the age of conscription, having been excused temporarily from military service through the influence of the dowager Czarina, who had heard him perform. His exemption proved troublesome. "I've just come back from Hamburg & Copenhagen," Fels was writing to Daniel Kiefer in October, 1910, "where I went to work for Zimbalist, our Russian violinist ward, to keep him from being forced to serve in Russian army. Took me a week, as also Mrs. Fels & 2 others. Cost me some 'massumon' too, but it's cheap all the same. Z is the greatest fiddler in the world today & America will hear him in 1911." (When Zimbalist, already the sensation of London and Berlin, reached the United States in the autumn of 1911, Alma Gluck, the renowned lyric soprano heard him perform in New York City. In London in June 1914, at the home of Mrs. Joseph Fels, she married him.)³

Members of the Women's Freedom League met at Elmwood on Saturday, July 18, 1908, to hear four speeches climaxed by Margaret McMillan's stirring remarks:

The world—this wretched world!—has need of women. The whole population is debased by the existence of an immense number of persons who never have enough to eat, and this will never be put to right unless women come into the arena with new power, new impulses, and new love.

Later at their London home, Mr. and Mrs. Fels served refreshments to the suffragists from East London who petitioned Prime Minister Asquith, a gesture they repeated when Willie Graham came down from Edinburgh leading a deputation of Scottish ladies. And upon George Lansbury's release after a brief imprisonment and hunger strike in 1913 for his impassioned demands for votes for females, he was taken in by Joe and Mollie Fels at 10, Cornwall Terrace, to recuperate.

Joseph Fels loved George Lansbury as he loved Earl Barnes, for the causes he had made his own, and for the fights they had shared together. "You are doing good work. You are always trying to do better work. You have the respect and love of many people. You have mine and ours," Fels once wrote Lansbury. He enclosed his receipt in full for the £345, which Lansbury owed him for personal loans, returning Lansbury's cheque for £300 payment on account. "You will use the enclosed in such ways as will give you and yours the happiest results," Fels instructed his friend.

When Mr. and Mrs. Lansbury's eldest child, Bessie, died in June 1909, leaving three children of her own, neither Joseph nor Mary Fels could face the funeral. "I just couldn't come today," Joe wrote to the bereaved Lansburys. "It could do no good, and would have broken me up for days. I can bear sorrows, but can't bear to see others sorrow. It *unmans* me, and I'm only a poor weak mortal at best."⁴

The meeting at which Margaret McMillan addressed the Women's Freedom League members at Elmwood in 1908 came about five years after Fels' first encounter with the redoubtable feminist. Late in 1903 Fels had attended a reception in honor of Miss McMillan, then known chiefly for her efforts in educational reform. The occasion was held to celebrate Miss McMillan's return to London after her resignation from the Bradford School Board, on which she had served since 1894. During the course of the reception, while talking with the reformer, Fels offered her financial assistance "if she would conceive and carry out a scheme of hygienic centers of larger scope than Bradford had been able to allow her."

From Bradford, Miss McMillan returned to London, where she renewed earlier connections with Stanton Coit's West London branch of the Ethical Society, lecturing and writing for her living from modest quarters in Bromley. In due course she decided to test Fels' offer. She and her sister took the train to Bickley, where Fels himself met them at the door of Elmwood. "Come in, come in!" he said, "or rather come out, for we are all in the garden." The McMillan sisters followed Fels to the rear of the house, where the family and guests were sitting about on the lawn which stretched far down to a line of glass-houses. The shadows of great cedars fell across the slope where Mary Fels sat with Walter Coates, "her adopted son," as Miss McMillan identified him in recounting the occasion. "Mr. Fels walked restlessly about the cedars. He looked pale, as if he had overtired himself in a vain effort to use up his distressing vitality." Coates and Mrs. Fels arranged chairs, and soon the group was agreeably seated just within the French doors of the drawing room, half inside and half outside on the lawn. "Mr. Fels alone



Mary Fels in her twenties

Mary Fels in her fifties



walked hither and thither, darting back to us to make jokes, or to kiss his wife," Margaret McMillan's account continues.

"What have you been doing lately?" said Walter Coates to me, sitting in the doorway with Mary Fels' hand in his.

I took the scheme [for health centers for children of the poorest classes] from my pocket and showed it to Walter Coates, who read it through carefully.

"I'll get it typed," he said.

"What's that, Walter?" said Mr. Fels, whirling out from behind the trees. "A scheme, eh?" In vain, Walter handed the document to him. He did not read it, but put his hands firmly into his pockets.

"Look here," he snapped, "something to help poor children? Health Centre, eh? Start at once. I'll give you five thousand pounds."

Fels' offer took Margaret McMillan aback for an instant. "Then he asked me to walk with him. We strode up and down the lawn, he always a little in front, white, eager, tormented almost, longing for more and more action." He brought up their earlier meeting at Bradford and the offer he had made to help her. He emphasized that "he wanted to help me," Miss McMillan stated, "that he *would* help, willy-nilly. He forced home his offer with great vehemence. The fact that I had scruples about taking the money made him all the more urgent." Fels settled the matter by saying that it represented nothing of importance to him, the sum was a small amount anyway.⁵

Margaret McMillan approached the school authorities of the Number Two district of Deptford with her scheme toward the end of July 1905, together with Fels' offer to provide up to £5,000 for the establish-

ment of a single center for the demonstration of her ideas in connection with physical education. The slums of Deptford in East London, the place of the *deep ford*, were very still and deep as always, wrote Miss McMillan. Each year unnumbered persons among "the soft, black yielding mass" of the borough's unfortunates slipped out of sight unnoticed beneath the cruel waters of poverty.⁶

Her memorandum called for pioneering approaches in physical education beyond the familiar system of drill, free exercises, or exercises with clubs or poles. Existing systems of exercises did not, in her opinion, effect radical improvements in personal habits or individual condition. Nutrition, sleep, bathing, and the elimination of waste material conditioned health, but the "scavenger work," as she called it, had not yet been undertaken seriously in elementary education.

The reason is not far to seek. It is not, as a rule, pleasant work. But when it is fairly done, every school subject can be approached with a new aim and in a new spirit. The possibilities of the healthy, growing human body are very great. They are obscured by defect, by inertia, by impurity. But when the scavenger work is well done, a new vista is opened at once.

Diseased or pest-ridden school children induced "spurious and degraded forms of teaching," while healthy pupils were fit for the best quality of training. Dirt and disorder, she argued, are the "arch-enemies of growing life," and she proposed an elaborate bathroom-classroom as well as a swimming pool for the center.

The Education Committee of the London County Council treated her ideas as unsound and extravagant romanticisms. "They were," however, "sufficiently mag-

nanimous to be willing to accept the money without the plan," Mary Fels reported sarcastically.

The basic trouble was that the Educational Adviser, the Executive Officer, and the Medical Officer were philosophically opposed to the conditions set forth by Miss McMillan. Since neither Fels nor Margaret McMillan would retreat from the stipulations of their proposal, Fels finally, in September 1906, withdrew his offer, at the same time expressing the hope that the Council would take a broader view of the whole scheme in the near future.

"Never mind them," he told Margaret, "you can have the money." He could see almost no prospect of cooperating with the authorities, he said, and she would do better to work alone with his support, as his own contests with the Local Government Board over relief of unemployment clearly showed. Margaret McMillan, however, chose to strive for the necessary statutory changes which would permit local authorities to provide treatment for individual children if they wished to do so. "To have started otherwise wholly on their own," she realized, "would have been to have lasted so long as Mr. Fels would support them, and then to have discredited the scheme by their failure." She prepared a brief that called for medical inspection in the schools, arguing that progress toward the physical improvement of the children would have to be an integral part of the whole society's improvement, and she obtained the support of many of the leading medical men of London. Owing substantially to her efforts, the Education Bill of 1906 embodied provisions for medical inspection. This particular bill was dropped, but the vital clauses giving the option to local authorities to provide medical treatment for children if they so desired were contained in its successor, and these

carried in the Education Act of 1907. She returned to her main objective thereafter, the establishment of health centers.

Fels continued to admire her originality and courage, and granted her £400 annually for her projects, though never again any sum approaching the magnitude of £5,000.⁷

Even before Walter Coates, Elizabeth Kite fell out of the orbit of complete domination by the Fels, when in 1906 she left her post as companion to Mrs. Fels, ostensibly to translate a book written by a French priest on the topic of gardens for the unemployed of Paris. Miss Kite offered to translate the work "for their sakes as well as my own," as she put it, and the task required her to take lodgings near the British museum. Her primary reason for leaving, however, as she wrote later, "was that I thus escaped" from a tangled affair of heart and mind in which Mary Fels had become involved. According to her companion, Mary had had various affairs, despite her self-imposed barriers against sexuality. "She sensed her power over men. She demanded her right to dominate them, and she rejected any thought of surrender to a mere man." Mary Fels' "only *complete* surrender," according to Miss Kite, was in London to a university extension lecturer whose courses she took, a married man with children. Mary described all that transpired to Elizabeth, saying that "the only sin is secrecy," yet apparently told no one else. "The situation, possibly suspected by some," wrote Miss Kite, "weighed on me heavily lest, however unwillingly, some inkling of the true state of affairs might become known through something I might do or say. . . . This man dominated Mary's mind as no man had ever done before. Mary sacrificed her husband for

him, but Joe was so absorbed in other things he scarcely seemed aware of what was going on.”⁸

It was not only his large land projects in both England and the United States—nor his other, lesser projects, such as his backing of Margaret McMillan (not to mention his continuing successful conduct of business affairs for Fels and Company)—that absorbed Joseph Fels’ attentions so thoroughly during these years that “he scarcely seemed aware of what was going on” in his household; it was also the minor quixotic causes he continually found himself espousing. For example, in the spring of 1906 he was interposing himself in the case of a prisoner once again who—like Gypsy Cortez earlier—he felt had been unjustly confined. This time the prisoner was one William MacQueen, an Englishman who had resided at Leeds and Leicester for several years, but who was in 1906 serving a sentence in the United States, in the New Jersey penitentiary at Trenton, for inciting to riot and instigating bloodshed during the silk workers’ strike at Paterson in 1902.

An acquaintance of Fels near Trenton had enlisted his help by sending him a pamphlet written by the Reverend Alfred W. Wishart, pastor of the Central Baptist Church in Trenton. In writing to New Jersey Governor Edward Casper Stokes, Fels stated that Wishart’s plea for the prisoner “induced me to go personally to see people who knew MacQueen in order to confirm the claims made regarding the man’s innocence.” Fels spent a day in Leeds interviewing persons mentioned in Wishart’s pamphlet, as well as several businessmen and two members of Parliament. MacQueen was a trade unionist, Fels discovered, who had done what he could by public speaking to promote higher wages and better circumstances for his fellow-workers,

but he had never been heard to favor forcible means nor other than legal methods. "Unless MacQueen suddenly changed into a savage during his journey across the ocean or after landing in America, the man is incapable of violence, and I am convinced that he is innocent," Fels declared. He sent money to the Reverend Wishart to help him continue the fight for MacQueen's release, a fight that the minister had commenced at the unofficial instigation of Judge C. D. W. Vroom, then a member of the Court of Errors of New Jersey and also a member of the Board of Pardons.

Fels reached Philadelphia from England on June 15, 1906, and went to Trenton to talk with Wishart. Of this meeting the minister later wrote: "He stayed at my house all night, and we visited several judges of the Board of Pardons, who were also on the Court of Errors and Appeals bench." Several months later on another U.S. visit Fels and Wishart went to the city of Paterson where the strike had taken place. "It was a bitterly cold day," Wishart wrote,

and we tramped all day long visiting business men, everywhere meeting with rebuffs and sometimes almost insults, because it was believed by the Paterson men that MacQueen was a very wicked and dangerous criminal and that we might be in better business than trying to secure his release from the penitentiary.

At this point H. G. Wells made a national scandal of the MacQueen case by entering the fray—probably through the urging of his friend Fels. Wells visited Reverend Wishart at Trenton, and went with him to see MacQueen in prison. The novelist then published in *Harper's Weekly* an article accusing the U.S. Secret Service of manufacturing evidence to detain MacQueen. This brought President Theodore Roosevelt

boiling into the case with denunciations of both Wells and Wishart. Roosevelt charged Wishart with keeping "improper company" in bringing Wells to his side, and Wishart replied in kind. Of his letter to Roosevelt, Wishart wrote:

I imagine I was a little sharp . . . because I told him very plainly that unless he could furnish evidence that MacQueen deserved imprisonment I refused to abandon the case, even at the dictation of the President of the United States. I intimated to him that this was not Russia, and the case would be decided by the courts and not by the authority of anyone else.

Wishart's argument could never have persuaded Roosevelt of MacQueen's innocence, however. President McKinley's assassination by an anarchist was still too vividly remembered, and there was widespread fear in the United States of anarchism and equivalent doctrines of radical nature. "My point was," Wishart explained, "that any evidence tending to show that MacQueen had been an anarchist had nothing to do with the case, for he was not tried for anarchistic opinions or anarchistic associations, but for inciting to riot in the city of Paterson."

Fels distributed Wishart's arguments widely, wrote a great many letters to influential men and women about MacQueen's case, and promised MacQueen employment whenever he came out of prison, if he could not obtain a job elsewhere. "Little by little friends sprung up on many sides," Wishart said, and after two years of battling, MacQueen was released. He went back to England and lived out his days in Leeds.⁹

One tangent of these years, minor among Joseph Fels' many interests, yet dependent upon his obsession

with land monopoly, proved to have broader significance than any of the others. In May 1907 more than 300 revolutionary socialists traveled to London for the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party's Fifth Congress. Among the delegates were V. I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky, who had been in London together five years before, and Joseph Stalin, who had never been outside Russia. As it turned out, the meeting was the last formal gathering of Russia's Marxist revolutionaries before 1917, and it marked the peak effort attained by the united party before the revolution, with five major delegations attending. These were Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, Polish Social Democrats, Lettish Social Democrats, and the Jewish Bund.¹⁰

The congress had originally been scheduled for Viborg in Finland, then a Czarist duchy, but its advance agents were driven out of Finland by order of the Russian police. Equally unsuccessful in Stockholm, they turned to Denmark, where for a time it appeared as though a refuge would be offered in Copenhagen. Quarters were engaged and delegates were on their way when suddenly the Danish monarchy intervened to forbid the assembly, obviously in response to Russian pressure, for King Frederick VIII was the brother of the dowager Czarina, widow of Alexander III. So the delegates, most of them low in funds and traveling without passports, turned still farther westward, to England, where the government was at least indifferent if not friendly.

The financial strain upon the delegates was increased by a provision of British law that stipulated that all aliens arriving third class had to prove possession of a minimum of £2 sterling. This being the case, the socialists traveled second class, where sufficient funds were taken for granted, yet that necessity increased

their class consciousness. According to one Bolshevik, the delegates in their shabby jackets felt quite miserable as they contrasted themselves with their well-dressed fellow passengers on the North Sea crossing to Harwich. Nor was their state of mind eased by a report published in the sympathetic *Daily News* stating that lists of the delegates together with their physical descriptions had been forwarded by Czarist agents to all Russian frontier stations, together with the order: "Detain, search, and telegraph to St. Petersburg." They could not, therefore, turn back.¹¹

The Fifth Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party opened its first general meeting Monday morning, May 13, at Brotherhood Church, a "tin tabernacle" of Christian Socialist persuasion off Southgate Road, Islington. J. Ramsay MacDonald, M.P., sporting a flaming red necktie, and speaking in behalf of his congregation, which had somewhat unwittingly loaned its edifice for the occasion, delivered several fiery welcomes to the delegates. Admission was by official identity ticket only, windows facing on the street were closed, and the strictest secrecy was imposed throughout. Maxim Gorki, who arrived shortly after the opening of the congress from a self-imposed exile—"hungry for a Russian face, the sound of the Russian tongue, a glimpse of the 'giants' of the movement"—found the meeting hall "unadorned to the point of absurdity." Gorki wrote that "Any resemblance to a church was restricted to the outside of the building. Inside there was no trace of anything ecclesiastical, and even the low pulpit, instead of standing at the far end of the hall, was placed at the entrance midway between the two doors."

Because of factional fighting over the fundamental nature of the party and its tactics for revolution, de-

liberations were protracted. The breach between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks widened to the point where ultimately they opposed each other on almost every question of policy and tactics, with finally the attention of all delegates concentrated upon Plekhanov and Lenin, the heads of the two great factions. Gorki recalled that he had never encountered two protagonists with so little in common. He decided in favor of Lenin: "The one was finishing his work of destroying the old world, the other was beginning the construction of a new."

The congress arranged to interrupt itself during the hours for Sunday services and Wednesday evening prayers, but otherwise, day after day for more than three weeks, the marathon sessions continued. A caterer installed a buffet in the foyer of the church where inexpensive refreshments were sold, and where Gorki's wife, the beautiful Maria F. Andreyeva, could sometimes be seen dispensing beer from a large barrel. As *Daily News* editor H. N. Brailsford remarked at the time: "There can have been nothing quite like it since stealthy gatherings of primitive Christians under the persecuting Emperors."¹²

The dwindling of the delegates' financial resources added the final jarring note to the affairs of the congress. Many of the delegates had exhausted their personal funds on the long journey to London. Now they were learning how difficult it was to exist on their small daily allowance from party funds. Also, the worker-delegates were fearful of overstaying the leaves granted from their jobs in Russia, while almost all of them lacked fares for the long passage home. Leo Deutsch, Georgii Valentinovitch Plekhanov, Angelica Balabanov, and Maxim Gorki were pressed into service as an Economic Committee to seek additional funds in London,

where—surprisingly—a number of contacts existed between the revolutionaries and English society. Prince Peter Kropotkin was the foremost of these contacts. Long a resident of London, the brilliant communist-anarchist was widely admired among the delegates. Fanny Stepniak, a friend of Kropotkin and Fels, represented an earlier generation of Russian revolutionaries and was attending the congress as its guest. Fedor Rothstein, a Marxist who had left Russia as a youth during the 1890's and was now an English Social Democrat on the staff of the *Daily News* as well as an editor of *Free Russia*, the organ of the Society of the Friends of Russian Freedom, could also be depended upon, as could his associate, H. N. Brailsford. Additionally, H. M. Hyndman, Harry Quelch, Cunningham Graham, Mrs. Bridges Adams, the Fisher Unwins, and Ramsay MacDonald, of course, among leftists were attracted to the Russians' cause. On the periphery there were influential clusters of liberals who were sympathetic to any prospect for improvement over Czarist despotism. Some of them were merely adventuresome dilettantes, as Angelica Balabanov remembered them, titillated easily "with tales of persecution in darkest Russia." Finally, there was a group whose interest in the congress stemmed primarily from enthusiasm for Russian literature. Constance Garnett, the translator of Turgenev, Chekhov, and Tolstoy, was prominent among these.¹³

Fedor Rothstein and Henry Noel Brailsford of the *Daily News* brought the plight of the Fifth Congress to Joseph Fels' attention. Their newspaper had been sympathetic to George Lansbury's causes as well as to Fels' Landon scheme, and Fels agreed to see them. He seemed on the verge of agreeing to help, according to Brailsford, but hesitated, saying he must first con-

sult his "almoner." Brailsford's hopes chilled, until he saw the familiar, sympathetic features of George Lansbury in the doorway. Lansbury was the soapmaker's "almoner" of the moment, and he agreed instantly that help for the Russians would be an excellent means of investing Fels' "superfluous wealth."

Fels decided that he would like to see the congress in session, so—stopping only long enough to get cash at Fels' bank in case it would be needed—they hurried to Brotherhood Church, where they were ushered into gallery seats. Lenin was speaking on the rostrum below them. They listened silently for about 20 minutes as Lenin delivered a closely reasoned attack against the Mensheviks, which, according to Brailsford, who was close to Plekhanov's following, destroyed any hope of restoring unity among the factions. Fels was obviously moved by the purposefulness of the proceedings and, the intentness of the delegates, and even though he did not understand Russian, his sympathies were enlisted. He turned to Lansbury and declared: "I will lend the money." As an afterthought, he added his wish to have the signatures of all the delegates.¹⁴

Fels agreed to the loan, to be repaid by January 1, 1908, upon the condition of the delegates' immediate departure (an arrangement which suited the policy of the Mensheviks much better than it did that of the Bolsheviks), and a strangely businesslike transaction was consummated. The loan was for £1,700 (the Russian equivalent of about 20,000 rubles), without interest, from a Philadelphia capitalist living in England to a devoted band of Russian socialist revolutionaries, dedicated to the overthrow of the very class which their benefactor represented in their eyes.¹⁵

For Fels there was nothing incongruous about his loan to Russia's Marxists. He stepped into the breach

just when the congress was threatening to become a public charge because he entertained a deep sympathy for victims of Russian despotism, a sympathy he had repeatedly expressed. He had read Deutsch's account of his 16 years' exile in Siberia, and he had intervened on several occasions to assist talented young refugees from Russia. He could see the same hostile forces of landed aristocracy in Russia under the Czar that he was fighting in Great Britain, yet more deeply entrenched and distasteful in Russia, where there was systematic police brutality and virulent anti-Semitism. His personal sympathies led straight from his own liberal reformist circles in England into the ranks of the Mensheviks particularly, while no impossible barriers stood in the way for him of cooperating with the RSDLP in general. As George Lansbury recognized, it was "out of sheer love of humanity" that Fels lent his money to the Russians.

The Bolsheviks persisted in identifying every capitalist with the enemy, even those like Fels of whom temporary use might be made. Yet who could foretell that the Bolsheviks would ultimately crush the Mensheviks? All that mattered was an immediate improvement in the lot of the Russian people. A loan for seven months to the congress of the RSDLP can scarcely be regarded as reckless generosity on Fels' part. He believed that the single tax and land reforms could perform utopian wonders anywhere, and particularly in Russia, where so much needed to be done. He knew that Henry George's doctrines had made considerable headway in Russia, with Count Leo Tolstoy as the leading apostle for the single tax. He lent his money for the same reasons he was investing it in his English land schemes. He expected to be repaid; his policy was to invest in worthy causes rather than to donate charitably to them.

On the final day of the congress, May 30, the promissory note lay ready for signing. Its brief preamble read: "We the undersigned delegates to the Congress, for and on behalf of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, hereby promise to Mr. Joseph Fels on or before the first of January 1908, the sum of seventeen hundred pounds sterling, being the amount of a loan generously granted without interest." Then, headed by the firm signature of Leo Deutsch, some 240 delegates signed this testimonial of their indebtedness to the little soap-maker from Philadelphia.¹⁶

Not everyone signed, although all were urged to do so. Lenin did much of the urging, reportedly, yet he himself did not sign. One by one, according to Brailsford, as the signing went on, the leaders of the delegations climbed to the gallery to express their gratitude to Fels. Plekhanov arrived first, speaking graciously in perfect French. Trotsky came next, dynamic and erect, greeting Fels cordially in fluent German. Meanwhile Lenin, surrounded by his cohorts, slowly approached the iron stairs leading to the gallery. Joking and laughing he permitted his burly figure to be pushed up the steps. Then, face to face with his bourgeois benefactor, Lenin uttered no formal expression of thanks as Plekhanov and Trotsky had done, just a few brusquely spoken acknowledgments in German, whereupon he sat down beside Fels while the proceedings were concluded. Finally, as Lenin rose to leave, Fels pressed into his hands one of the single-tax tracts which he carried in his pocket!

Few delegates took the signing seriously. Some signed the note as it passed from hand to hand along their pews, others later as it lay on a table near one of the doors. Indignant mutterings were audible in the background, "and under their breaths they cursed the cap-

italist" whose name meant nothing to them and to whom no gratitude was due. The document had no legal force in their eyes. Some delegates even considered the note with its array of signatures to be a collector's prize with a prospective value far in excess of £1,700, professing to see the profit motive uppermost even in Fels' act of charity, though not all the delegates held such suspicions. Yet even moderate delegates like Abramovitch and Fanny Stepniak as a guest did not take the stipulated obligation for the forthcoming January first seriously. Many of them felt that it was ridiculous for a businessman to expect to be repaid for a loan contracted on the honor of a revolutionary party.

Joseph Fels had acquired a remarkable document at any rate, a veritable roll call of the Russian Marxist movement. The signatures were inscribed in the manifold languages and scripts of the Czarist empire. The delegates put their names down, or as in most cases their pseudonyms, in Cyrillic, Georgian, and Latin, in Russian, Hebrew, Polish, and German, the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks about evenly divided, most delegates of the Bund, the Letts almost to a man. Some signed who were otherwise without votes, as did Litvinov and Stalin. Among the first signers, the names of Plekhanov, Tseretelli, and Abramovitch stand out, together with that of Deutsch. Elsewhere one discovers Angelica Balabanov from Leipzig, Rosa Luxemburg, and "Antimekov" (Anti-Menshevik) hiding the identity of Klementi Voroshilov, who was to become a longtime member of the Politburo and to serve as Commissar of Defense during the Soviet Union's "winter war" against Finland in 1939-40. Additionally, there were several fine specimens of the revolutionary proletariat such as Anratsitov, Mechanik, Kolotov (the smasher), and Donner (thunder), all of whose pseudonyms, in addition

to Stalin (man of steel), testified to the spread of the industrial revolution and its political impact upon Russia. There was one who signed himself "Ulysses," which was not altogether surprising among a group so far from home, but who was the delegate who signed himself "Landyshev" after the lily of the valley?

It was clear that the delegates would not abide by Fels' stipulation for immediate adjournment. The Fifth Congress continued for two days more with attendance considerably diminished, voting its resolutions couched in equivocal generalities. Not much of importance was accomplished actually, though many questions had been hotly disputed. "All of the attacks of the Bolsheviks were repulsed," one participant decided, "but this was all." Finally, at midnight of June 1, in a nearby attic instead of Brotherhood Church, the 75 remaining delegates raised their voices in singing the "Internationale." The congress was adjourned, most of the delegates choosing to follow their comrades who were already homeward bound. In addition to his passage home, each delegate carried a gold British sovereign as a souvenir of Joseph Fels.¹⁷

Fels was soon regretting his impulsive generosity and pressing for repayment of his money. The amount involved was modest compared to his other ventures, but 1907 was a year of tight money. He wrote on September 28 to Rothstein, who had engineered the transaction in the first place:

I am in receipt of yours 27th advising that you have information from Russia that, as soon as the elections to the Duma are over, a portion at least of the money due me will be remitted. I can make the best possible use of the return of this loan, and hope the whole matter will be closed within the specified time for which it was borrowed.

But developments inside Russia were destined to disappoint Fels' hopes. Premier Stolypin had charged the Social Democratic Labor Party with revolutionary conspiracy following the Fifth Congress, and categorically insisted upon the suspension of almost all its representatives in the Duma. On Sunday, June 16, 1907, the Czar dissolved the Second Duma and imposed a reactionary electoral law designed to deprive the socialists of their parliamentary sounding board. A period of bitter reaction set in and the party of revolution was soon scattered to the winds. Stalin's men staged the famous "expropriation" of the bank at Tiflis, escaping with more than one-third million rubles. Yet their success was short-lived; Lenin's agents, including Litvinov, were arrested when they attempted to convert the loot into smaller notes. Lenin himself fled to Geneva from Finland to begin his second and longest exile from Russia. Ten years would elapse before the next party congress. The lean years of Russian revolutionary agitation had begun.

Through Rothstein, Fels continued to prod the revolutionaries for his money as though he was unaware of events in Russia. Lenin in Geneva ignored him for some time, until he was told that Fels was threatening to publicize the whole affair if his money was not forthcoming quickly. Lenin replied apologetically to Rothstein, stating that he had written repeatedly to Russia urging repayment, but he knew that the party could not raise the money under present conditions. Many comrades were already under arrest, said Lenin, membership and financial records had been seized, printing presses confiscated, and Finland rendered unsafe as a base of operations. The bourgeois intelligentsia were quitting the party in droves. The party's financial plight had been made even worse by two years of working

openly and legally through the Duma, which had "spoiled" the mechanism for the disciplined undercover work of conspiracy and revolution. "This should be made clear to the Englishman [Fels]," Lenin wrote to Rothstein,

and one should explain to him that the conditions of the epoch of the II Duma when the loan was concluded were altogether different, that of course the party will pay its debt, but to demand it now is impossible, unthinkable, that would be extortion. . . . The Englishman must be made to understand. He can't get the money. And a scandal would do nobody any good.

Matters rested there for a time. Lenin informed Rothstein in July 1908 that he would refer the question to the forthcoming meeting of the party's Central Committee. He emphasized how awkward it would be for him to interfere personally just when the proper authority was about to convene.

In August the Central Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party met in plenary session in Geneva, and among other matters appointed a subcommittee composed of one Bolshevik, one Menshevik, and one Bundist to write Joseph Fels explaining why their obligation to him could not be honored just then. Their letter to Fels detailed the circumstances which had exhausted the party since the London congress:

Thus has a situation arisen in which we, to our profound regret, have found ourselves unable to repay promptly the debt we owe you, and are even compelled to ask you for an extension of the term for some little time longer.

Fels let the matter drop as more or less hopeless, and nothing more transpired between him and the RSDLP.¹⁸