Theodor Aronovich Rothstein (1871–1953) was a Russian émigré who settled in England in 1890. In 1895, he joined the Social-Democratic Federation and became part of its left wing. A strong supporter of the Bolsheviks following the 1903 split in Russian Social Democracy, he also took an active part in English political life. He supported the unity process that led to formation of the British Socialist Party in 1911, involving a merger between a number of socialist groups and the SDF (which had become the Social-Democratic Party in 1907). After the outbreak of the First World War, Rothstein took a prominent part in the move to oust Hyndman and his ‘patriotic’ national clique in the BSP in 1916, and later participated in the foundation of the British Communist Party. He returned to Russia in 1920 and became increasingly involved in the USSR. From 1921 to 1930, he was engaged in diplomatic work and later took a position with the Soviet academy. Rothstein was a frequent commentator on imperialism, particularly British imperialism, for the international socialist press. His articles, written for the English socialist journals The Social Democrat, Justice and The Call, have been collected and are available online at the Marxist Internet Archive. He is also the author of a book on the history of British socialism.
Numerous observers of English life have for a long time regarded it as a banal truth that England, of all the countries of Europe, was the one that enjoyed the most normal development. Unlike France, Germany and the rest of the continental states, where the social processes took place at an often changing tempo, now slowly, now quickly, and where they often overtook each other and mutually paralysed each other, in England, it was thought, social development proceeds gradually and at a measured pace, never hastily but always decidedly and firmly. Slowly, but systematically, one advance followed the other; development was never suddenly interrupted; old institutions never departed before the new ones had fully materialised. And, as they appeared, existing arrangements died out as soon as their usefulness turned into uselessness and the detrimental effects were perceptible.

This view of English life was long held, as we said, as a banal truth; it was even accepted in the social sciences. England is a country developing in a completely normal way, and whatever happens in it corresponds to the direction of its social life; it is just a specific episode resulting from and illustrating the general course of its evolution. No wonder that, when the South-African War broke out many people were astonished. For generations, England has been synonymous with democracy, progress and freedom – and now suddenly that War, that shameless filibuster raid on two free republics, undertaken and led in the most disgraceful way for the sake of a handful of money-makers sans foi, sans loi [faithless and lawless]. What horror, what a painful surprise! Had the English people perhaps suddenly fallen victim to a blinding sickness; were they perhaps afflicted by a mind-numbing disorder?

1. [Rothstein 1908. Note by the editors of Die Neue Zeit: 'The article was written before the conflict that broke out in the Liberal Party over the motion of Lloyd George, but it could not be published earlier due to lack of space.' On 17 June 1901, the House of Commons debated the use of concentration-camps for Boer civilians, on a motion from Liberal MP David Lloyd George denouncing their management. The motion was defeated by 253 to 154, with almost 50 liberal imperialists abstaining.]

2. [The reference is to two independent Boer republics of the Orange Free State and the South-African Republic (Transvaal Republic).]