

# ‘Socialism’ and ‘What we have to look for’: Two unpublished lectures by William Morris

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## P R E F A C E

‘Socialism’ and ‘What We Have to Look For’, along with *Our Country Right or Wrong*, and ‘*Communism, i.e. Property*’,<sup>1</sup> are taken from two large notebooks (now held as Add. MSS. 45,333 & 45,334) which May Morris’s executor Robert Steele donated to the British Library after her death. These volumes contain twenty-three of Morris’s essays on socialism, in his characteristically firm, legible hand (Figure 1).

Some of these had appeared in *Hopes and Fears for Art* (1882) and *Signs of Change* (1888), and May Morris had included others in *William Morris: Artist Writer Socialist*, but she found it necessary to truncate some, and to fuse others into her longer narratives. Three decades later, Eugene LeMire printed several additional essays in *The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris*, and smoothed the path for potential successors with his meticulous appendix to that volume, ‘A Bibliographical Checklist of Morris’s Speeches and Lectures’.<sup>2</sup>

Scholarly editions of the essays of other Victorian writers such as Matthew Arnold and Thomas Carlyle have long been in print, as have the works of Marx, Engels and other nineteenth-century socialists. A comparably comprehensive edition of Morris’s socialist writings would draw on the work of May Morris and LeMire, as well as Nicholas Salmon’s reprinting of Morris’s journalism, and editions of individual essays by Paul Meier, Alan Bacon and others.<sup>3</sup>

Passages also printed by May Morris are reproduced in Gill Sans.

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Socialism.

I think I may without offence assume that a large part of my audience know no more of Socialism than the name, and that it will be convenient to look upon our wide way Stephen's subject from an elementary point of view; and this all the more as I shall be liable to the same criticism so treating it as I should be if I attempted something more elaborate: for this is a subject where the admission of the principle is the one important matter, nor ought it be so difficult for me to lay these principles before you; while at the same time if I can do so with any amount of clearness, there is nothing so abstract in them nothing so technical but that any intelligent person could at once understand them. Indeed it were strange if it were not so since Socialism has to do with all that is practical in our daily life.

But again even those of you who know that they know nothing of the principles of Socialism may think that they understand pretty well those on which our present Society is based, and that they have nothing to learn here: but this assumption beg leave to deny: it is only by learning something of the ~~principle~~ Socialism that we can understand what the present Society is, what it aims at doing, & what are the means whereby it carries out its aims. Most of you I fancy never put to yourself the question why are am I in the position which I am? Why is the workman the beggar, the pauper, the criminal in his position; and why is the great capitalist the land owner, in a word the rich man in his position? Few of you have ever doubted the necessity of the classes into which Society is divided, or supposed that

NOTES

1. Florence S. Boos, *Our Country Right or Wrong*, London: William Morris Society, 2008, 95 pp.; ‘From the archive: “Communism, i.e., Property”, a partly unpublished Morris essay’. *William Morris Society in the United States Newsletter*, Summer 2009, pp. 15–20; <http://www.morrisociety.org/newsletters/newsletter-july09.pdf>. (Accessed 27 September 2010)
2. *Hopes and Fears for Art*, London: Ellis & White, 217 pp; *Signs of Change*, London: Reeves & Turner, 1888, 202 pp; May Morris, *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1936, 2 vols, 673 + 641 pp; Eugene LeMire, *The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969, 331 pp.
3. Nicholas Salmon, ed, *William Morris. Journalism: contributions to Commonweal, 1885–1890*, Bristol, Thoemmes Press, 1996, 674 pp; Paul Meier, ‘An Unpublished Lecture of William Morris: “How Shall We Live Then?”’, *International Review of Social History* 16, 1971, pp. 217–40; *The relations of art to labour*. Reprinted from the Co-operative Wholesale Societies Ltd. England & Scotland Annual for 1890. Edited with an introduction by Alan Bacon and an appendix by Lionel C. Young, London: William Morris Society, 2004, 83 pp.

*Figure 1 – First page of manuscript of ‘Socialism’; B. L. Add. Ms. 45,333, f. 13. (All images reproduced courtesy of the British Library Board.*

## I. 'SOCIALISM': INTRODUCTION

William Morris designed 'Socialism' (1885) as a kind of radical-egalitarian stump-speech for working-class audiences. He delivered it many times between June 1885 and November 1887, but, except for a four-page excerpt in *William Morris: Artist Writer Socialist*, it has remained unpublished.<sup>1</sup> Morris had begun to study Marx's writings in 1883 and used the word 'socialism' in public for the first time in 'Art and Socialism' on 23 January 1884. Though respectful of Marx—he wrote in 1887 that Marx seemed to be 'the only completely scientific Economist on our side'<sup>2</sup>—he also held throughout his years as a political activist to the conviction that socialism is an ethic, not a deterministic science, and in his attempts to convey this ethic in jargon-free language to radical, reformist and working-class audiences, avoided talk of 'trade cycles,' 'surplus labour' or 'value added'.

Morris began 'Socialism' with a stark description of the chasm between a small propertied class and a kind of corporate-feudal underclass of workers who could not 'be said to have more than a subsistence wage,' and were protected from penury only until 'their time, of industrial death so to say, comes on them' [f. 18]. Members of this underclass were 'free', of course, to sleep under one of Anatole France's notorious bridges. But their 'masters'—a medieval expression Morris often employed—were also free to exploit them without let or hindrance; to force displacements of populations which undermined familial solidarity; and to let hunger and exhaustion demoralise them and 'keep them in their place' (as it always had).

Another pattern remained from Roman slavery and medieval villeinage: 'the class which lacks wealth is the class which produces it' [f. 19], and production would cease, therefore, if all the worlds' oppressed workers could manage to 'withhold their labour'<sup>3</sup> (the great dream of a 'general strike'). But if all the worlds' managers, shareholders and board members withheld *their* labour, 'production of wealth would go on pretty much as before, though we might reasonably hope that its method of distribution would be altered' [f. 19].

Some members of the propertied class, Morris readily acknowledged, made useful contributions to society, 'chiefly [in] physic, education, and the fine arts'. Others—'lawyers and clergymen' among them—would be harmless enough if they did not draft repressive laws and bless the cannons of the real ruling class: those who 'engaged in gambling or fighting for their individual shares of the tribute [which they have] compelled the working class to yield ...' [f. 20].

One consequence of this interminable conflict, Morris argued, was that ordinary workers have been defrauded of 'about two thirds of all they produce' [f.20], for '... besides the profit or unpaid labour that he yields to his immediate master, [the worker] has to give back to the employing class ... a great part of the wages which he receives from his immediate master' [f. 21]. Capitalists' 'direct' profits

might appear to be ten percent or less. But workers’ indirect losses—like the widow’s mite—were ‘all they had.’ For they had no choice but to pay exorbitant prices for rent, basic needs, a workhouse system, dues for self-protection to trades unions, and the ‘services’ of other minor exploiters who ‘form[ed] a system of wheels within wheels’ [f. 20] which left them with little or nothing.

The landlord class, moreover, profited from the labour which created and ‘improved’ their properties, even though such improvements might take grotesquely destructive forms—for example, when

a piece of barren ground or bog becomes a source of huge fortune to [the landowner] from the growth and development of a town or district, and he pockets the results of the labours of thousands of men and calls it *his* property [f. 22].

No matter: the tip might be exhausted and the land poisoned for generations, but the masters could ‘begin the game over again, and carry it on forever, [they] and [their] heirs...’ [f. 22].

Morris spoke from all-too-direct personal experience. Most of his family’s original wealth was derived from extraction of copper and, later, arsenic from a 142 acre (57 ha) patch of land near Tavistock in Devon (South West England), which a consortium including his father had leased from the Duke of Bedford. One of Morris’s uncles was the mine’s ‘resident director,’ and he himself had acceded to his family’s expectation that he serve for a time on the board of ‘the family mine’<sup>4</sup> When, therefore, he described someone who

seem[s] to be doing something and receives his pompous title of an organizer of labour, [but] what he does ... is nothing but organizing the battles with his enemies[,] the other capitalists who happen to be in the same way of business as himself ... [f. 22],

Morris knew whereof he spoke.

At this point, Morris asked whether there was no way we might hope to eliminate the gross inequities (in his words) ‘written into the constitution of our present society’? Must we resign ourselves to a bitter variant of the final lines of *Middlemarch*: that ‘the good nature and kindness of individuals may more or less palliate the evils the source of which can never be dried up’ [f.23]? If so, it might seem natural to cry out from the depths for a

new religion ... [which] will take such a hold of the hearts of men[,] [so that] that those who have the opportunity will forgo the excitement of gambling with other people[’]s property ...’ [f. 23].

Though Morris was an agnostic, a good argument can be made that this is exactly what he did. His doomed hero of *A Dream of John Ball* subscribed to such a faith,

as had the Diggers of the seventeenth-century, and many Quakers.<sup>5</sup> In common with Morris, some of these ardent souls subscribed to a common tenet: that 'equality of fellowship is necessary for developing the instincts of good and restraining the instincts of evil which exist in every one' [f. 24]. It is realisation of this egalitarian ideal which remains a 'thing unseen'.<sup>6</sup>

In the language of a young Marxist in *Another Country*,<sup>7</sup> the elusive object of Morris's faith (or 'religion of socialism') might be called 'earth on earth': a regulative ideal of fellowship or solidarity which would

[avert] the waste of the few and the want of the many [f. 25];

[offer] a chance of happiness to every one [so that] ... an injury to one will be an injury to all [f. 24];

[and free us from the] abiding fear ... and all the self[-]inflicted misery of our civilization [which] form a terrible burden, the sense of which is deeply impressed on the art[,] the literatures[, and ] the religion of mankind [f. 25].

The latter, by the way, is one of very few passages in Morris's socialist essays in which he evoked an ideal of literature as a witness to human sorrow and part of the 'conscience of mankind.'

Indeed, recent history has, rather alarmingly, seen an increase in inequality: there is really more difference [now] in the manner of life and the refinements attainable between the two classes than between the employer and the employed of earlier times ... [f.27].

In response to the standard argument that such states of egalitarian grace are beyond human reach, Morris countered that 'to suppose that when the former systems [of routine slavery, for example] have passed away this latter one must necessarily outlast the world is manifestly absurd' [f. 26], for 'whenever [egalitarian ideals have] appeared, [they have] always done so with renewed force and wide scope' [f.28].

'[T]he ashes of the old struggle,' moreover, 'are not quite burned out' [f.28]. Workers more 'conscious of the antagonism between the classes' [f.28]<sup>8</sup> were also more aware that 'the real question ... is whether the masters have any claim to profit at all; that is[,] in other words[,] whether the masters are necessary ...' [f. 29], and trades union leaders who ignored this growing awareness did not, therefore, 'represent the whole class of workers as working men[,] but rather are 'charged with the office of keeping the human part of the capitalist machinery [free] from any grit of discontent' [f. 29].<sup>9</sup> Morris found other signs of this activism and awareness in the fact that the 'Radicals' had become hard-pressed to

define issues which distinguished them from the Conservatives, and ‘the boundaries between the old [political] parties are now thrown down’ [f.29]. The ‘great class of workers,’ by contrast, were a force which he hoped was ‘slowly but surely developing into a new society, and only needing complete organization of their scattered elements to become that society’ [f.30].

Anticipating *News from Nowhere*’s ‘Great Change,’ he repeated that pre-revolutionary Britain could ‘see nothing but the relation of masters and servants,’ and when people finally understood this, they would ‘find themselves face to face with revolution, that is to say the New Birth of Society’ [f.30]. He earnestly hoped that this birth would not be an agony, and that

... the waste and misery of civil war may be avoided: but remember that it can only be avoided by the combination and organization of all that is most energetic, most orderly, most kindly, most aspiring among the working classes’ [f.31].

At this point, Morris reminded his audience of the need to act in solidarity with their fellows in other countries (a maxim which has almost always been honoured in the breach), and appealed to what might be called the ‘hortatory fallacy’ (the passionate assertion that what ‘*should*’ be ‘*must*’ and ‘*will*’ be) to assure them that ‘nothing but mere brute force of armed men or abject poverty now prevents that outbreak of the last stage of struggle’ [f. 31], and that

the change in the basis of society must come, and [we must] cho[o]se whether there shall be ... violence[,] confusion and chaos, or whether we shall glide into the future peaceably ... [f.31].

Returning to what ‘*should*’ be (or what we ‘*should*’ desire), Morris added that ‘[w]e want to make people leave off saying this is mine and that is thine, to say this is ours’ [f.32]—an echo of ‘Mine and Thine,’ a poem he published in *Commonweal* on 2 March 1889<sup>10</sup>—and explained that ‘collective ownership’ would (or should) not mean that ‘the state’ would hold all property, but that it should ensure that ‘there is none left out, or it has no right to call itself a community, a Commonwealth’ [f.33]. All must work, for wealth comes from labour, but work cannot be judged hierarchically: ‘[workers’] needs will not be estimated conventionally by the supposed value or dignity of the work which they do’ [f. 33].

Anticipating the objection that nursing a child (say) is not as ‘hard’ as designing a steam engine, he appealed to the justice of the formula ‘from each what he can do; to each what he needs’ [f.34] to argue that ‘the man who can do the higher work does it as easily as he who does the lower’ [f. 33], and to familial ideals of care for the sick and the old to ask, ‘why it is that in the bigger family called society[,] the rule should be for each to do his best to snatch the meal out of his fellow[’]s mouth as glaring wolves are used to do?’ [f.34].

Acknowledging that workers ‘hoodwicked’ by propaganda may believe the ‘masters’ are, after all, masterful, he asked why most capitalists are (against the counsel of earlier moderates such as Richard Cobden and John Bright) addicted to chronic overproduction, and in one of the essay’s most eloquent passages, linked this pattern with war:

You cannot give away the overplus; nay you cannot even carry it out into the fields and burn it there and go back again merrily to make some more of what you don’t want; but you must actually pick a sham quarrel with other people and slay 100,000 to get rid of wares which rid of you are still intent on producing with as much ardour as heretofore: O lame and impotent conclusion of that Manchester school which has filled the world with the praises of its inventiveness and its energy[,] its love of peace! [f. 37]

But if, as he hopes, individual ownership will be abolished, the producers will have all the means of labour at their disposal:

when this takes place, the land, capital, the machinery, the plant and stock in short, will naturally fall into the possession of the producers, since it would be useless to anyone else[, and] our class society would cease to exist [ff. 36–37].

Admittedly, ‘much would have to be done first, troublous times, partial failures even would have to be met before we could quite shake off that old fear of starvation’ [f.28]. But if workers came together to demand their ‘final freedom; freedom to work and live and enjoy’ (f. 38), then ‘the mask [would] fall ... from the face of this huge tyranny of the modern world ... [and] the risks of destruction [would] seem light compared with the degradation of championing an injustice [f.38]. If, finally,

the intelligent of the working classes and the honourable and generous of the employing class could learn to see the system under which we live as it really is, all the dangers of change would seem nothing to them[,] and our capitalistic society would not be worth 6 months purchases. [f.38]

But ‘*if*’ cannot be identified with ‘*when*’, and ‘*should*’ cannot be identified with ‘*must*’. Therein lie the ‘troublous times’ and the (not so) ‘partial failures’ to which he alludes [f. 23].

As suggested earlier, ‘Socialism’ was a stump speech in which Morris strove to convince his audiences, as well as to ‘look at things bigly and kindly.’<sup>11</sup> Like Immanuel Kant’s ‘realm of ends,’ then, Morris’s socialism has remained ‘*nur ein Ideal*’, but an essential ideal. For without it, we are like the ‘proud dispiteous rich man’ in *A Dream of John Ball*, who, ‘though he knoweth it not, is in hell already,

for he has no fellow ...’<sup>12</sup>

In order to see what Morris may have meant by this, consider again the secular implications of John Ball’s avowal that

... fellowship is heaven, and lack of fellowship is hell: fellowship is life, and lack of fellowship is death: and the deeds that ye do on this earth, it is for fellowship’s sake that ye do them, and the life that is in it, that shall live on and on forever, and each one of you a part of it, while many a man’s life upon the earth from the earth shall wane ...

Solidarity may well remain forever a state of unstable equilibrium, and Morris’s ‘religion of socialism’ may be infeasible. But his secular faith in ‘things unseen’ has drawn readers for more than six generations to the great peroration of *John Ball’s* ‘sermon at the crossroads’:

[O]nce again I saw as of old, the great treading down the little, and the strong beating down the weak, and cruel men caring not and kind men daring not; and the saints in heaven forbearing and yet bidding me not to forbear ... [But] he who doeth well in fellowship and because of fellowship, shall not fail though he seem to fail today, but in days hereafter shall he and his work yet be alive, and men be holpen by them to strive again and yet again; and yet even that was little, since, forsooth, to strive was my pleasure and my life.

## NOTES

1. May Morris, *William Morris: Artist Writer Socialist*, Vol. II, Oxford: Blackwell, 1936, pp. 193–97. According to the ‘Bibliographical Checklist of Morris’s Speeches and Lectures’ in Eugene Le Mire’s *Unpublished Lectures of William Morris*, Detroit: Wayne State U P, 1964, p. 303, Morris delivered ‘Socialism’ twelve times between 9 June 1885 and 8 November 1887: to the Oxford branch of the Socialist League; the Northampton branch of the National Secular Society; the Working Men’s College in Bloomsbury; the Hammersmith branch of the Socialist League (in his absence by May Morris); the Peckham and Dulwich Radical Club in Peckham; the Hackney and Shoreditch Branches of the Socialist Democratic Federation; the Patriotic Club in London; the Dublin, Bradford and Glasgow branches of the Socialist League; and a meeting of Huddersfield socialists.
2. Norman Kelvin, ed, *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, Vol. II, pp. 393–94. (Afterward *Letters*) He would also have been acquainted with the outlines of Marx’s ideas through H. M. Hyndman, whose *England for All* (1881) borrowed heavily from

*Das Kapital*. On 23 April 1883 Cornell Price recorded in his unpublished diary that ‘Top ... was full of Karl Marx, whom he had begun to read in tr.’ (Nicholas Salmon & Derek Baker, *A William Morris Chronology*, Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996, p. 126). On 26 November 1884 Morris described Marx’s theory of surplus value to William Allingham (*Letters*, Vol. II, p. 340), and on 28 February 1885 advised an unknown recipient, ‘On the whole tough as the job is you ought to read Marx if you can; up to date he is the only completely scientific Economist on our side.’ Book I of *Das Kapital* became available in translation in 1887, the year in which Morris produced a series of articles for *Commonweal* with Ernest Belfort Bax, ‘Socialism from the Root Up.’ Of a meeting on 15 February 1887 with Bax, Morris noted that he had been ‘glad of the opportunity for hammering some Marx into myself.’ But he essentially saw Marx’s system as one of many arguable rationales for socialism, and remarked on 30 December 1887 to a correspondent whom Kelvin has identified possibly as E. J. Collings that ‘Socialism does not rest on the Marxian theory’ (*Letters*, II, p. 729).

3. Robert Owen’s Grand National Consolidated Trades Union had advocated a ‘General Strike,’ an idea later taken up by anarchists.
4. Cf. Charles Harvey & Jon Press, ‘The City and Mining Enterprise: the making of the Morris family fortune’, *Journal of the William Morris Society* IX, 1 (1990), p. 12. See also Florence Boos & Patrick O’Sullivan, forthcoming, ‘Morris and Devon Great Consols’.
5. The Diggers were a group of agrarian communists (fl. 1649–50) led by Gerard Winstanley and William Everard, who sought to reclaim the ‘Commons’ for the people. See Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution*, London: Temple Smith, 1972, 432 pp.
6. In Chapter 8 of *News from Nowhere*, Old Hammond describes the faith of the new society: ‘But now, where is the difficulty in accepting the religion of humanity, when the men and women who go to make up humanity are free, happy, and energetic at least, and most commonly beautiful of body also, and surrounded by beautiful things of their own fashioning, and a nature bettered and not worsened by contact with mankind? This is what this age of the world has reserved for us.’ Similarly, in *Socialism from the Root Up*, Morris and Bax take up the issue of religion in the new society, and conclude that ‘As regards the future form of the moral consciousness, we may safely predict that it will be in a sense a return on a higher level to the ethics of the older society, ... and the identification of individual with social interests will be so complete that any divorce between the two will be inconceivable to the average man.’ (Reprinted from the ‘Commonweal’, 1886, Chapter 23, part 2 (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1888/sru/ch23-2.htm>);

- Paragraph 8; as accessed 27 September 2010).
7. Julian Mitchell, *Another Country: A Drama*, New York: French, 1982, 104 pp.
  8. Before the Trades Union Act of 1871 gave legal status to trades unions, their leaders could do little more than request higher wages during periods of expansion.
  9. For an account of failed protests at the ‘Morris family mine’, see John Goodridge, ‘Devon Great Consols: A Study in Victorian Mining Enterprise,’ *Reports and Transactions of the Devon Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature and Art*, 96 (1964), pp. 247–52, 256, 263. Also Gerry Woodcock, ‘Strike!’, in *Tavistock’s Yesterdays: Episodes from Her History*, Callington, Cornwall: Woodcock, 1993, pp 57–65, and Frank Booker, *The Industrial Archaeology of the Tamar Valley*, Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1971, revised edition, Chapter 13 ‘Devon Great Consols Mine’, pp 143–177.
  10. Florence Boos, ‘Poems Published After 1875,’ no. 21 (<http://morrisedition.lib.uiowa.edu/listpoemslatertext.html#21>, as accessed 27 September 2010). May Morris told her readers that Morris had composed this poem—which included translations of two strophes of ‘Wapene Martijn,’ by the Flemish poet Jacob van Maerlant (fl. ca 1230–after 1291)—after the discussion which followed a talk about ‘The Fourteenth Century’ he had given at Kelmscott House (May Morris, ed, *The Collected Works of William Morris*, London: Longmans, 1910–15, vol. IX, p. xxvii).
  11. To Aglaia Coronio, 25 November 1872, *Letters*, Vol. I, p. 173.
  12. *A Dream of John Ball and a King’s Lesson*: (reprinted from the ‘Commonweal’), London: Reeves & Turner, 1888, 143 pp. This and the following passages are from Chapter 4 (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1886/johnball/chapters/chapter4.htm>, as accessed 27 September 2010). s

## ‘SOCIALISM’

*British Library Add. MS 54,333, ff. 13–38*

[f. 13]

I think I may without offence assume that a large part of my audience know no more of Socialism than the name, and that it will be convenient to look upon our wide[,] nay stupendous[,] subject from an elementary point of view; and this all the more as I shall be liable to the same criticism so treating it, as I should be if I attempted something more elaborate: for this is a subject where the admission of

the principle is the one important matter, nor ought it [to] be so difficult for me to lay these principles before you; while at the same time if I can do so with any amount of clearness, there is nothing so abstruse in them[,] nothing so technical[,] but that any intelligent person could at once understand them.

Indeed it were strange if it were not so since Socialism has to do with all that is practical in our daily life[.]

But again even those of you who know that they know nothing of the principles of Socialism may think that they understand pretty well those on which our present society is based, and that they have nothing to learn here: but this assumption I beg leave to deny: it is only by learning something of Socialism that we can understand what the present society is, what it aims at doing, & what are the means whereby it carries out its aims.

Most of you I fancy never put to yourselves the question[,] why am I in the position in which I am? Why is the workman[,] the beggar, the pauper, the criminal in his position; and why is the great capitalist[,] the landowner, in a word[,] the rich man[,] in his position: few of you have ever doubted the necessity for the existence of classes into which society is divided, or suspected that [f. 14] the arrangement might not go on for ever. Even when you have felt most discontented with your own lot or that of your fellow men, you have supposed that it is[,] has been & will be necessary for the existence of society that there should be a rich class and a poor one; therefore you have never troubled your heads as to what makes some men belong to the poor, some to the rich class, but have supposed that it was a piece of accident, or say a provision of nature so deeply rooted and abstruse in its origin that it is no use enquiring into it.

We Socialists on the contrary believe that we know why these classes exist and how they have grown into what they are, a growth inevitable indeed, but so far from being eternal that it will itself destroy itself and give place to something else, a society in which there will be no rich and no poor.

Therefore before we look specially into the matter of what Socialism is[,] let us consider how our present society is composed; since by the light of that contrast we shall see things that might otherwise be obscure.

The society of the present day[,] like all others[,] is founded on the necessity of the human race for constant labour, for a ceaseless contest with nature who without labour gives us nothing: when you hear people talking about the possibility of things being free; education, libraries & what not, you must understand that some person or persons have to pay for them, we don't & can't mean to say that they are given to us; we have made them & won them before we can use them.

[f. 15] There is no question then as to whether man must labour in order to live, but there has always been a question as to how that labour shall be apportioned amongst the members of society, and also how its results shall be shared amongst them. I have no time to go into the history of the answer to these questions; I will

only remind you that for ages both the work and the wealth won by it from nature have been unequally divided: there has always since the dawn of history in communities called civilized been a class which has had much work and little wealth living beside another class which has had much wealth and little work. Also during all this time those civilized communities have professed various religions which have inculcated justice and fair dealing, and have even sometimes bidden men to bear each other[']s burdens, the strong to work for the weak, the wise for the foolish, the provident for the thriftless; and yet these precepts of morality have always been thrust aside and evaded by class by-laws so-to-say, and today it is still a rule of our society amidst all our refinement[,] all our shrinking from violence and rudeness[,] that those who work most shall fare the hardest, and that the reward of idleness shall be abundant wealth. Clearly then[,] either those precepts of morality are mere foolish dreams and bid us to do what we recognize now to be impossible; or else those class by-laws which bid us evade them with a clear conscience are ruinously misleading, the foundation of continuous unhappiness and of future degradation and the downfall of civilization.

That to my mind is the alternative.<sup>1</sup> Yet I admit that at the present day people do try [to] [f. 16] evade the horns of the dilemma; the inequality and undeserved misery of our class society they say are inevitable, nor can we apply the precepts of justice and love to them except that within those classes we can palliate the poverty on one side[,] the luxury on the other[,] by our individual efforts toward kindness & manliness: hapless and futile compromise! to fight feebly against the results of the very machine that we have made & uphold, conscious all the time of certain defeat: thus do we the well[-]to[-]do & prosperous dull the sting of conscience, and yield ourselves to the stream of class violence, our best hope being that joy may oppose itself to grief, health to disease, right to wrong[,] life to death—for a little while, but that the sum of all is and must be irresistible evil.

With this modern pessimism which has taken the place of the stern hope of medieval pietism wherein the wretched slaves of this world were to be joyous masters of the next; with the pessimism of the well[-]to[-]do of a luxurious age we socialists have nothing to do: we say those precepts of morality were not and are not mere ‘Counsels of perfection[,]’ the birth of dreamy fanaticism, but rather the principles of reasonable action, rules of mutual defence against the tyranny of nature, and that the society which acts on them will be far wealthier and infinitely happier than our present one; that the sum of its wealth will be so great, that even the rich men of the present day would find in it ample compensation for the loss of the riches which they cannot use now for their own happiness but which, whether they will it or not, must be used for the unhappiness of their fellows.

[f. 17] For what is the composition of society at present, the society founded on so called freedom of contract, on labour and capital, cash payments, and the supply and demand markets?

It is simple; far simpler than that of past ages and especially of the last age, the feudal period, which was based on a hierarchy wherein each from the highest to the lowest had (in theory at least) his rights and his duties to those above and below him: all these elaborate groups have since the full development of the commercial period been resolved into two great classes, those who possess all the means of the production of wealth save one, and those who possess nothing except that one, the power of labour. The first class[,] the rich[,] therefore can compel the latter, or the poor, to sell that power of labour to them on terms which ensure the continuance of the rich class, and therefore properly speaking own the poor class and indeed are called their masters: only as the latter are very numerous & the former but few, the masters dare not drive them into a corner for fear they should rebel against them: indeed in one way or another they have rebelled even in our own times, and are organized, for rebellion (though but badly and loosely) into trades unions, at least in England.<sup>2</sup> If it were not for this fear of revolt, this constant struggle on the part of the workmen to get more out of the employers[,] all workmen would only get as much as would supply them with bare necessities, that is[,] would enable them to live[,] work and breed; but as it is[,] a proportion of the workmen do get more than this bare subsistence wage: these are the skilled workmen, especially [f. 18] in those crafts where women and children cannot be employed to reduce the wages of adult males, & those protected by trades unions; of the rest[,] few of them can be said to have more than a bare subsistence wage, and when they grow sick and old would die if it were not for the refuge afforded them by the workhouse, which is purposely made as prison-like and wretched as possible for fear that the lower paid workers should in their despair take refuge there before their time, of industrial death so to say, comes on them.

This then is the first distinction between the two classes, that the one possesses nothing but the power of labour inherent in their own bodies, and the other possesses everything necessary to make that labour fruitful; so that the labourers cannot work until they have obtained leave from their masters to do so, which the latter will only grant on the condition that the workers will yield up to them all they produce over and above their livelihood, which as I have said above[,] is mostly only just enough to live on and seldom or ever rises much above that. Unless they rebel the workers must accept these terms, since they must live from day to day: moreover owing to the ever increasing productivity of labour[,] helped by the wonderful machines of our epoch, and organized for production with so much skill, and owing also to the long hours of labour, and the employment in most trades of women and children to whom it is not even pretended that a subsistence wage is given, there are, taking one year with another, more workers than there is work for them to do, so that they compete with each other for employment, or in other words[,] sell their labour-power in the market at Dutch Auction to their masters: so that the latter are able now-a-days to dispense [f. 19] with the exercise

of visible force in compelling them to work which in earlier days of the world masters used towards their slaves.

Besides this distinction between the classes of one possessing wealth, and the other lacking it, there is another to which I will now draw your attention: the class which lacks wealth is the class which produces it, the wealth owners only consume it. If by any chance the whole of the wage-earners or ‘lower classes’ were to perish or leave the community, production of wealth would come to a standstill unless the masters were to descend to the level of their former slaves and learn to work for their livelihood: if on the contrary the masters were to disappear[,] production of wealth would go on pretty much as before, though we might reasonably hope that its method of distribution would be altered.

I will here meet an objection which will probably occur to most of you: you will say[,] do not the masters[,] or what you call the possessing class[,] work? Undoubtedly a large part of them do work, but for the most part their work is unfruitful or sometimes directly harmful. There are some useful occupations[,] chiefly physic, education, and the fine arts[,] which are exercised by members of the privileged classes: of whom one can say nothing worse than that they are paid too high in proportion to their workmen; so that they partly earn their livelihood and partly fleece it from the workers: but these are but a small part of the possessing classes, as to number, and as to the wealth they hold it is insignificant compared with that held by those who do nothing useful. As to these last, some of them do not pretend to do anything but amuse themselves, and these probably [f. 20] do the least harm; of the rest[,] some are engaged in work which only our complicated system of compulsion and inequality, of injustices in short, makes necessary, they, as lawyers & clergymen[,] for instance[,] are the parasites of the system: but the rest are engaged in gambling or fighting for their individual shares of the tribute which their class has compelled the working class to yield to it; they are never producing wealth[,] hard as they may work.

Again to answer another possible objection: the tribute taken from the workers is no trifle, but amounts in all to about two thirds of all they produce: but you may say such profits as that are seldom made by the employer[,] who has to be content with 10 percent perhaps, or perhaps even less in bad times. Well I have just said that it was the rich class that took this tribute[,] not the individual employer only; besides his tribute, which in all cases is as much as he can get amidst the competition or war with other employers, the worker has to pay taxes for payment[,] amidst other things[,] of the interest of the national debt which the privileged classes take to themselves: and remember that all taxes are in the long run paid by labour, since labour only can produce wealth: rent also he has to pay, and much heavier rent in proportion to his income than rich people[, as well as] the commission of middle-men, who distribute the goods he has made, and who instead of doing this distribution simply and for a moderate payment,

form a system of wheels within wheels, and make monstrous profits from their busy idleness: lastly if he is fairly well to do he has to pay to a benefit society or a trade union a tax for the precariousness of his employment brought about by the gambling of his masters, he has to help them to pay their poor rates and [f. 21] thus actually enables the master to shut his factory gates on him when there is an open trades dispute between employers & employed; since otherwise the master would be taxed for his subsistence in the workhouse. In short[,] besides the profit or unpaid labour that he yields to his immediate master, he has to give back to the employing class to which his master belongs a great part of the wages which he receives from his immediate master.

Now it is clear from this that there is a class struggle always going on between the employers and employed, though neither party may be conscious of it: the interests of the two classes are opposed to each other: it is the object of the employing class to get as much as it can out of its privilege, the possession of the means of production, and all it makes can only be made at the expense of the workers, any increase in the fertility of the possessions of the rich must come from the labour of the poor: on the other hand if the workers succeeded in raising their standard of life they can only do at the expense of the rich; what one gains the other loses; there is therefore constant war between them, and yet it is a war in which the capitalist must always win until the workers resolve to be an inferior class no longer.

Meantime observe that the privilege of the possessing class consists in their power of living on the unpaid labour of others: if the capital of the rich man consists of land, he forces his tenant to improve his land for him[,] exacts tribute from him in the form of rent[,] and still has his land improved generally when the transaction has come to an end, so that he can begin the game over again, and carry it on for ever, he and his heirs: [f. 22] If he has homes on his land, he has rent for them also[,] often receiving the value of the buildings many times over, and at the end house and land once more: not seldom a piece of barren ground or bog becomes a source of huge fortune to him from the growth and development of a town or district, and he pockets the results of the labours of thousands of men and calls it his property. Or the earth beneath the surface is found out to be rich in minerals, and he is paid enormous sums for leave and license to labour them into marketable wares. And all the while in each case he has been sitting still doing nothing, or it may be worse than nothing; devising means perhaps in parliament for strengthening & continuing his pernicious domination. Or again if his capital consist[s] in cash, he goes into the labour-market, and directly or indirectly buys the labour-power of men[,] women and children and uses it for the production of wares which shall bring him a profit, keeping down their livelihood to as low a point as they will bear in order that the profit may be greater, which indeed the competition or war with his fellow capitalists compels him to do. Nor does he do anything to earn this profit, nothing useful in any case, and he need do

absolutely nothing; since he can buy the brain power of managers and foremen on terms a little higher than he buys the hand-power of the ordinary workmen; mostly he does seem to be doing something and receives the pompous title of an ‘organiser of labour,’ but what he does even then is nothing but organizing the battles with his enemies[,] the other capitalists who happen to be in the same way of business as himself, and so both his idleness and his industry do but serve to make [f. 23] life hard and anxious for all of us.

Thus then[,] I have told you briefly what the composition of our society is in this age of Commerce. Let me recapitulate before I go further: There are two classes, a useful and a useless class: the useless class is called the upper, the useful the lower class: the one class having the monopoly of all the means of production except the power of labour can and does compel the other to work for its advantage so that no man of the workers receives more than a portion, the lesser portion too[,] of the wealth he creates; nor will the upper class allow the lower to work on any other terms: I must add that as a necessary consequence the rich class[,] having great superfluity of riches[,] withdraws many of the workmen from the production of wealth and forces them to minister to its idleness[,] luxury or folly, and so by waste makes the lot of the labourer harder yet.

This I say [is] the constitution of our present society; and surely you will not deny that if I have stated the matter truly, it is but a sorry result of all the struggles of man toward civilization. You may admit that, yet think the misery of it inevitable and eternal, and that nothing can be done but to hope that the good nature and kindness of individuals may more or less palliate the evils the source of which can never be dried up. Or you may perhaps hope that some new religion will arise which will take such hold of the hearts of men that those who have the opportunity will forgo the excitement of gambling with other people[']s property and the pleasure of living luxuriously at other people[']s expense, and will live justly and [f. 24] austerely[,] considering themselves as nothing more than trustees of the wealth which the people have made and entrusted to their care. I will not say that this will not happen[,] but I am sure that when it does these leaders of humanity will at once manifest their newly gained moral sense by begging their fellow man to relieve them from their position of dignity and authority which will for ever tempt them[,] or rather compel them[,] to live in that very way which they have found out to be degrading to themselves and oppressive to their fellows. In sober earnest I say that no man is good enough to be master over others; whatever the result to them, it at least ruins him: equality of fellowship is necessary for developing the innate good & restraining the innate evil which exists in every one.

But indeed I do hope for the rise of a new religion, nay with all earnestness I preach to you now, for it is called Socialism. It proclaims the necessity of association among men if the progress of the race is to be anything more than a name; Society it says must be the condition of man[']s existence as man: and the aim

of that society is something higher than the greatest happiness of the greatest number: it is to offer a chance of happiness to every one; that is to say[,] an opportunity for the full development of each human life: it denies the title of society to any system which degrade[s] one class to exalt another; nay more[,] it asserts that if we injure any one member for the benefit of all the rest,<sup>3</sup> we have poisoned and corrupted our society: an injury to one will be an injury to all, & will so be felt in the long run.

Instead of that system [f. 25] now existing which exacts a tribute from one class in order that another may be freed from the necessity of labour, it asserts that each should pay his tribute of labour to nature, and each in turn receive his share of the wealth which each has done his best to create: so only[,] it says[,] shall we avoid the waste of the few and the want of the many: so only can we rise above that perpetual condition of war in which indeed the beasts live not unhappily, since their memory is so limited that they are not conscious of abiding fear, of anxiety, or of aspiration; whereas with us anxiety and hope deferred and all the self[-]inflicted miseries of our civilization form a terrible burden[,] the sense of which is deeply impressed on the art[,] the literature[, and] the religion of mankind.

Combination for livelihood[,] therefore[,] and the assurance of equal chance<sup>4</sup> for every one are what we socialists want to bring about, and probably most of those here present will agree in thinking such an aim is good: but I suppose some will say the thing is impossible; a little knot of people preaching certain utopian doctrines cannot bring about such a stupendous revolution as this. Well, no set of people know that better than socialists: at no time can a part of a society existing change the basis of the society unhelped by those of past ages: but we socialists claim that the progress of mankind has really been steadily in this direction, and that all we have to do is to help [in] developing the obvious & conscious outcome of this progress. I have not time now to go into the historical side of the question: I prefer to lay before [you] the [f. 26] aims of socialism in as much detail as possible: but I am obliged to remind you that there have been since the beginning of definite history three conditions under which industrial production has gone on: mere slavery under the classical peoples; serfdom in the Middle Ages, and wage labour and capital today: to suppose that when the former systems have passed away this latter one must necessarily outlast the world is manifestly absurd, and there are abundant signs of the approaching change for those who can read them. There has always been a double thread running through the history of mankind; contention for individual gain has been visible always[,] but so also has the tendency towards combination for common gain, the two have been always visibly contending with one another, and whenever the latter has appeared, it has always done so with renewed force and wider scope: and in these later times combination for the production of wealth has progressed immensely with the result that the productive powers of labour have so increased, as to become at last an absolute

evil under the present system; of that more promptly. It was discovered ages ago that one man working with tools could produce more than was necessary for his own subsistence, and on this discovery class society was built; tribes when they went to war took prisoners and made them slaves instead of killing them, because the slave could live on less than he produced: but to jump over a long interval of various transition[s,] the change from mere tools to machines as auxiliaries of man[']s own powers has quite enormously increased the margin between the necessary livelihood of a man and his capacity of production, especially since an elaborate system of cooperative organization has gone along with the invention [f. 27] of the machines: the increased wealth so produced has notoriously not gone to the labourer but has enriched the classes who live upon his labour, and especially has almost made a rich middle class whose life is not distinguishably less easy or luxurious than that of the territorial nobility: so that though there was theoretically more difference between the slave of ancient Greece and Rome and his master[,] the gentleman citizen, or between the serf and the baron of the feudal period than there is now between the workman and the capitalist, there is really more difference in the manner of life and the refinements attainable between these two classes than between the employer & employed of earlier times: in fact there is so much real difference that there is now no necessity for making those arbitrary and legal distinctions which once drew [a] line of demarcation between rich and poor: the upper classes can now with a cheap generosity afford to declare all classes equal before the law; since they well know that they cannot avail themselves of that sham equality; a sham equality I say, so long as men have not economical equality, so long as they are not on equal terms in disposing of their labour-power: for we have seen that the whole of the working class is compelled to give an hour[']s work for less than an hour[']s just pay[,] that is[,] for less than the amount of wealth produced by that work.

Now the upshot of all this [is] that the contest of classes which has always gone on is now limited to a narrow issue and simplified by being cleared of all by-issues. It was necessary for the supremacy of the [f. 28] commercial classes, the capitalists, that political and legal freedom should be established, since they on the one hand needed the working class as allies against the aristocracy of hereditary privilege, and on the other needed the workman free from all bondage and all support which would hinder his labour power from being a mere commodity saleable in the market like other wares. Therefore two classes[,] the employers and employed, that is[,] the sweaters and the sweated[,] are now face to face; and though it is true that the ashes of the old struggle are not quite burned out, and in England the working classes are not fully conscious of the antagonism between the classes, yet the consciousness of that struggle which has so long been going on cannot be much longer delayed. On the defeat of Chartism[,] itself a political movement on the surface, though at bottom it meant revolution, the Trade

Unions became the visible token of the class struggle in this country: they gained during a period of great commercial prosperity all the success they were capable of gaining, to wit an improved position for the better off of the workmen engaged in the more consolidated industries: but they can no longer be considered as fighting bodies, partly perhaps because they have been lulled asleep by their very success, but chiefly I believe because the issue has been changed since the time when they were most vigorously at strife with the masters: the Trades Unions claimed a mere rise of wages when the selling price of the article they made rose, admitting the necessity of their accepting lower wages when it fell: only in their palmy days the general tendency of the market was [f. 29] to rise as it now is to fall, so that they appeared to sustain the class conflict much more than they did, as their strikes were then often successful[,] and of course were so at the immediate expense of the capitalists: in any case a rate of wages roughly proportioned to the rate of profit made by the masters was what they strove for: all classes are now feeling that that point is won so far as it goes, though there may be a little bickering on individual cases, and that the real question now is whether the masters have any claim to profits at all; that is[,] in other words[,] whether the masters are necessary, and accordingly the Trades Unionists and their leaders who were once the butt of the most virulent abuse from the whole of the Upper and Middle Classes are now praised and petted by them because they do tacitly or openly acknowledge the necessity for the masters['] existence; it is felt that they are no longer the enemy; the class struggle in England is entering into a new phase, which may even make the once dreaded Trades Unions allies of capital, since they in their turn form a kind of privileged group among the workmen: in fact they now no longer represent the whole class of workers as working men but rather are charged with the office of keeping the human part of the capitalists' machinery in good working order and freeing it from any grit of discontent.

Again look at the change which has come over the world of politics: the boundaries between the old parties are thrown down; the difference between the programme of the Tories and the Liberals is so small that no one but a mere party man can take any interest in the conflict between them; nay the very radicals whose name was once used for frightening babies with, are at this moment finding it difficult to get out a programme [f. 30] which shall distinguish them from the Tories, and have to rely on the hope that the chapter of accidents may force their opponents into a position reactionary enough for them to attack safely; without the fear of their lending themselves to the progress of Revolution.

For you see the explanation of this is that the real movement of today is quite outside the conception of political parties: it is true that those parties are conscious of the existence of the great class of workers, but they look upon them merely as an instrument to be played on for the 'good of society,' instead of what they really are[,] a great force slowly but surely developing into a new society, and only needing completer organization of their scattered elements to become that

society. Such a contingency as that our Parliamentary system does not recognize and cannot recognize: it can see nothing but the relation of master & servant repeated in various forms throughout all society: it is driven indeed into trying to make those relations bearable to a large portion of the servants, for it has to admit that on its success in doing so depends the very existence of our present society: further than this it cannot go: when it is discovered as it is beginning to be[,] that the relations of master and servant is unbearable and produces misery & suffering that cannot even be largely palliated[,] its function will be gone and it will find itself face to face with revolution, that is to say[,] the New Birth of Society. When that day comes all that is progressive [in] it will melt into the Revolution, while its reactionary part will openly oppose the happiness of mankind: most vainly certainly, and one [f. 31] may hope so feebly, that it will have to yield to the mere threat of force, and that the waste and misery of civil war may be avoided: but remember that it can only be avoided by the combination and organization of all that is most energetic, most orderly, most kindly, most aspiring among the working classes: a moment's thought will show you that the Upper and Middle classes who are divorced from useful production could not resist the union of the useful, the Lower classes for a week. Take note then, working men, that the Revolution[,] the change in the basis of society[,] must come, and choose whether there shall be a transition period of violence[,] confusion and chaos, or whether we shall glide into the great [change] peaceably because obviously irresistibly.

It may be news[,] perhaps, as a further sign of the times, to some of you that though in England the consciousness of the necessity for revolution is only dawning, the populations of the continent are fully awake to it: nothing but mere brute force of armed men or abject poverty now prevents the outbreak of the last stage of struggle: or perhaps we may rather say that they are only waiting for one thing[,] the awakening of England, the great country of Commercialism, and consequently in spite of all appearances to the contrary, the country where the opposition of classes is most abundant.

Now as to the claims of that socialism which is advancing upon us certainly, though possibly slowly, I have in a way stated them in putting before you a sketch of the tyranny & folly of our present conditions; but I [f. 32] will now try to state them positively instead of negatively, which I feel to be all the more necessary since[,] though the word of socialism is now in everybody[']s mouth[,] I believe that the ideas of most people as to what it is or aims at are very vague.

The aim of socialism is to make the best by man's effort of the chances of happiness which the life of man upon the earth offers us, using the word happiness in its widest and deepest sense, and to assure to everyone<sup>5</sup> born into the world his full share of that chance: and this can only be assured to him by men combining together for this benefit: if we fight with each other for it[,] it is certain that some will gain it at the expense of others and in the struggle will waste as much

as they gain.

We want to make people leave off saying[,] this is mine and that is thine, and to say[,] this is ours.

In other words we look forward to a society in which all wealth would be the property of the community, would be held collectively.

But [so] as to not misunderstand this assertion as you easily may by not being clear about the use of the word property: property at present means the power of preventing other people from using wealth; as for instance a man may and often does refuse to cultivate a tract of land himself or to allow others to do so: but as we understand property[,] it means the possession of wealth which we can use ourselves: it is necessary to explain this because with the present ideas of property[,] when one talks of the community possessing all property you may have the idea of a government or state having the property and only granting the use of it to people on certain arbitrary conditions, that is[,] to certain privileged persons. [f. 33] But a socialist community would hold wealth only to use it, and it could only use it as a community by satisfying with it the needs of all its members, since a community consists of each and all the individuals composing it: there is none left out, or it has no right to call itself a community, a commonwealth.

Everyone's reasonable needs must be satisfied therefore[,] first for food & shelter, and next for pleasure bodily & mental; which would include the full development of every individual according to his capacity, an aim which is rendered possible by the great variety of capacity existing in the individuals of the race, & which socialism would foster as sedulously as the present system depresses it.

I have said that no arbitrary conditions would be imposed on the members of a true commonwealth for the satisfaction of their reasonable needs: but there is one condition which is not arbitrary and which all must accept: they must all work for the commonwealth or there will be in the long run no wealth: but their needs will not be estimated conventionally by the supposed value or dignity of the work which they do; because that could at once give rise to a fresh system of classes, that is[,] of privileged people tormenting the unprivileged: and why should labour be divided into privileged [and unprivileged]? [A]ll kinds are necessary to the common weal; nor is the difficulty & labour of exercising a specially excellent capacity at all proportioned to its excellence. The man who can do the higher work does it as easily as he who does the lower: neither again is the expensiveness of the workman[']s needs necessarily proportioned to the excellence of his work; nay the man who does the rougher work may need the more expensive livelihood, & if he does he ought to have it: In short[,] the maxim which true Socialism would carry out is[,] 'From each what he can do; to each what he needs.' [f. 34]

And if that seems to you an impossible maxim to carry out; pray consider what goes on in a well conducted family which is above the pressure of mere poverty: the sick[,] the weak, the old, the infants are not stinted of food or shelter or such

pleasures as they can enjoy because they add little or nothing to<sup>6</sup> the wealth that the family subsists on: they do what they can and have what they need: and if it be the rule in a decent family to bear one another’s burdens, tell me[,] I beg of you[,] why it is that in the bigger family called society[,] the rule should be for each to do his best to snatch the meal out of his fellow[']s mouth as glaring wolves are used to do?

You may still say[,] but is it possible on this larger scale? I have alluded before to the fact that every man working with due combination of his fellows in a civilized society can produce more than is absolutely necessary to his own subsistence: this [is] the basis of all industrial society; but in these latter days man[']s productivity has increased enormously because of the invention of machines and general improvement of organization, while his necessities remain what they always were. Now of the difference between what the workman needs to live on and the value of the wealth he produces[,] a very small portion goes to him, the main part being claimed by his masters as profit, rent, and interest; and the increase in that surplus value has in our days grown so enormous that nobody ever dreamed of the workman receiving a proportionate share of it: it seems to me that that increase has gone to create a rich middle-class whose occupation is to fight with each other for their shares of the surplus value of labour. This occupation cannot be necessary to the production of wealth, but unfortunately a [f. 35] large part of the working classes (whose occupation obviously is necessary to the production of wealth) is still under the influence of the superstition that the ‘employers of labour’[,] so called[,] are necessary to their employment: there is no wonder in that, they are ignorant, hard driven by need, & without leisure for thought, and moreover have been habitually hoodwinked by the writings of the intellectual part of the employing class, themselves probably unconscious or but half conscious of the fraud which class instinct compels them to commit.

But now at last their eyes are slowly opening to the real state of the case: the course of events is compelling them to feel[,] if not to see[,] that they must no longer depend on people to employ them who will very naturally make them pay for the fulfillment of that function: it is actually now being proved that the middle-class occupation of fighting for the share of the surplus-value wrung from the workers is useless & wasteful: trade is said to be suffering depression caused by over-production: over-production of what? Of wealth? That should mean that every person in the country has more than he needs to eat, more than he needs to wear, more and better house-room than he wants; well that would be a curse which we might soon modify into a blessing: but indeed it seems it does not mean that, and whatever it means it strikes people as a real evil to be abated at any cost: at Manchester lately I was told that it was the general opinion sustained by one of the economical lights<sup>7</sup> there that the one thing needed to amend the Depression of Trade was a great European war so that some of the surplus wealth might be destroyed. One’s brain

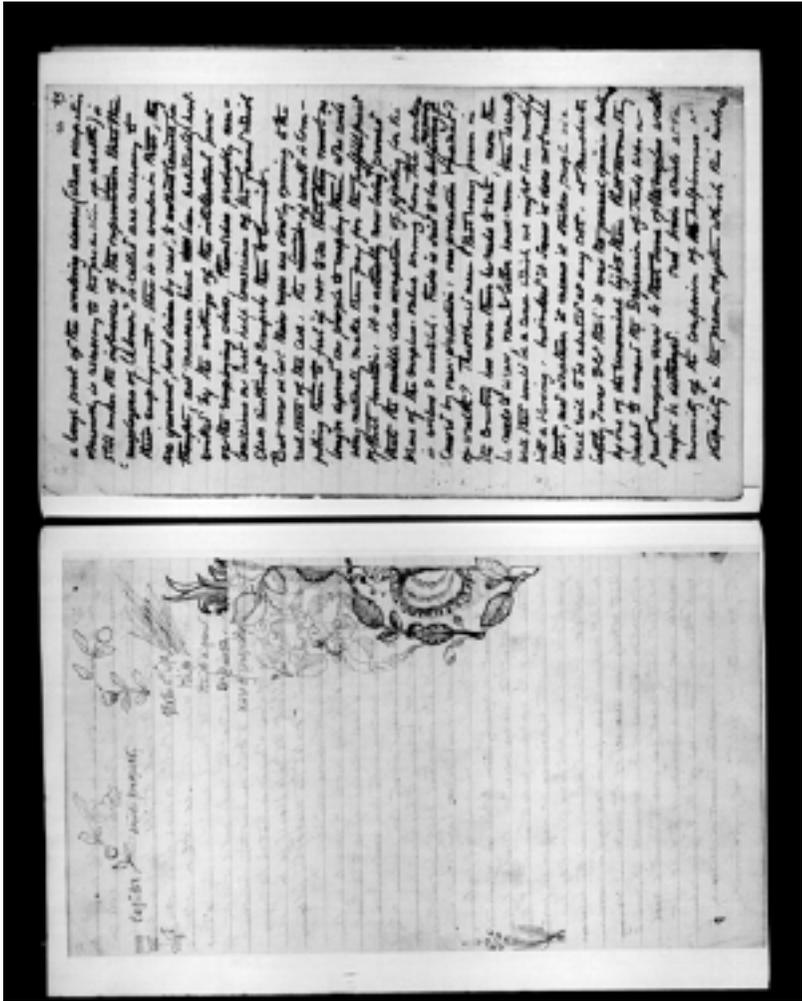


Figure 2—Floriated design, 'Socialism'; B. L. Add. Ms. 45.333. f. 34v.

whirls at the enormity of the confession of helplessness or stupidity in the present system which this involves[,] [f. 36] What! You have created too much wealth? You cannot give away the overplus; nay you cannot even carry it out into the fields and burn it there and go back again merrily to make some more of what you don't want; but you must actually pick a sham quarrel with other people & slay 100,000 men to get rid of wares which when [got rid?] of you are still intent on producing with as much ardour as heretofore: O lame & impotent conclusion of that Manchester school which has filled the world with the praises of its inventiveness[,] its energy[,] its love of peace! Strange that the new Atilla, the new Ghengis Khan, the modern scourge of God, should be determined to stalk through the world wrapped in the gentlemanly broadcloth of a [Q]uaker manufacturer!

In short[,] my friends[,] what this depression of trade really means, this over-production, is that for the time at least the middle-class who live on our labour & fight among themselves for their share of what it produces are finding that their warfare does not even pay them: and if they the plunderers must teach us this[,] surely we the plundered should not be slow to learn the lesson, which is simply that they are not needed. The remedy lies in the hands of the workers; their masters as a class cannot see it, will not tell us how to get rid of them.

The way how to get rid of the useless classes is to abolish the profit of the individual, to let the producer have in one way or other all that he produces: when this takes place, the land, capital, the machinery, the plant and stock in short, will naturally fall into the possession of the producers, since it would be useless to anyone else: nay[,] there would soon be nobody else to possess it, for there would be no surplus value available to keep [f. 37] an idle class[,] a non-producing class[,] upon: our class society would cease to exist.

I do not say that this would at once bring us to that condition of collective or communal holding of property which I have already put before you: much would have to [be] done first, troublous times, partial failures even would have to be met before we could quite shake off that old fear of starvation which our present competitive or plundering system has imposed upon us: before we got to see quite plainly that the loss to one involved loss to all: before we got instinctively to consider it a disgrace unendurable to an honest man to shoulder off our burden, now grown so light, on to another man[']s back; before the ease of livelihood[,] leisure and simple refinement of life allowed us to look upon work, the useful exercise of our special energies[,] as a daily recurring pleasure and not a daily recurring curse.

Yet all these good things we should[,] I am sure[,] gain in time when we had once taken that first [step]<sup>8</sup> of insisting that all shall produce as all consume, which means the abolition of classes.

And lastly if this revolution seems to you a prodigious one, as surely it is, I say once more it lies in the hands of the workers, of the useful classes[,] to bring it

about: whatever they demand must be yielded if reason backs them. When the complaint of the poor which has ever been heard dimly or less dim amidst the excitement of life rouses people at last to definite organization[,] they gain what they claim; yes[,] even when that organization is partial & imperfect. The Chartists [f. 38] claimed political freedom: it is now yielded: the Trades Unions claimed some share in the increase of the profit of the capitalists; that also had to be yielded, how ungraciously accompanied with what unmanly complaints, what base slander of the workers at the hands of their masters[,] some of you may forget but I remember: and now this last claim for final freedom; freedom to work & live and enjoy[,] as it is infinitely greater and more important than the others[,] so surely will be claimed more widely with greater intelligence & if possible greater determination. With what amount of resistance it may meet none can tell, but this is certain[,] that it [will] meet with no forcible resistance unless the upper classes can delude some part of the workers [to] take their part in defence of their unjust and pernicious position: nor less certain, I believe, that when the mask falls from the face of this huge tyranny of the modern world, & it is shown as an injustice conscious of its own wrong to the honest and just of the upper classes themselves[,] the risks of destruction will seem light compared with the degradation of championing an injustice.

Yes[,] I believe that if the intelligent of the working-classes and the honourable and generous of the employing class could learn to see the system under which we live as it really is, all the dangers of change would seem nothing to them and our capitalistic society would not be worth 6 months purchase.

It is in this belief that I am here tonight preaching to you that new good tidings of Socialism.

[notes 37v, probably taken during discussion]

how to carry out—

Malthusianism

details—

force

who is [to] initiate

head work

competition & emulation

people have all power when they know [it]—class-abstinence

community            individual earnings

unequal shares—

state holds the capital            difference in tastes—

failure of communities

marriage            democratic politics

education  
dissolute persons in families  
criminal –

## NOTES

1. Ms, comma.
2. Ms, colon.
3. Ms, ‘the’ repeated. ‘Socialism’ in this paragraph is underlined three times, not two as shown here.
4. Ms, comma.
5. Ms, every one.
6. Ms, ‘to’ repeated.
7. The Manchester School—Richard Cobden (1804–65), John Bright (1811–89) and other advocates of economic liberalism and ‘free trade’ opposed British military incursions and other imperial ventures. Gladstone, by contrast, during his second term in office instituted an Irish Coercion Act, and actively prosecuted imperial conflicts in Afghanistan, South Africa and Egypt.
8. Ms, [step] added in pencil, possibly by May Morris.

## 2. ‘WHAT WE HAVE TO LOOK FOR’:

### INTRODUCTION

Morris delivered ‘What We Have to Look For’ twice during the year before his death: to his beloved Hammersmith Socialist Society on 31 March 1895 at Kelmescott House, and to the Oxford and District Socialist Union on 30 October 1895 at Gloucester Green. The essay was short and valedictory (Figure 3), but handwritten notes at the end of his manuscript suggest that it aroused debate (see Figure 4, p. 48). May Morris included an excerpt from the beginning, and two shorter passages from the end, in *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist* (1936, vol. II, pp. 357–61), but the essay has never been published in full, and remains in the British Library as Add. Ms. 45,333 (3).

In ‘What We Have to Look For,’ Morris argued (as he had in *News from Nowhere* [1890–1891]) that the underlying aim of sincere socialists should be to bring about an ‘end of all politics’; that even ‘socialist’ political parties are makeshifts, as well as dubious means to untrustworthy parliamentary ends; and that no legislation in a capitalist society will bring about anything more than tenuous

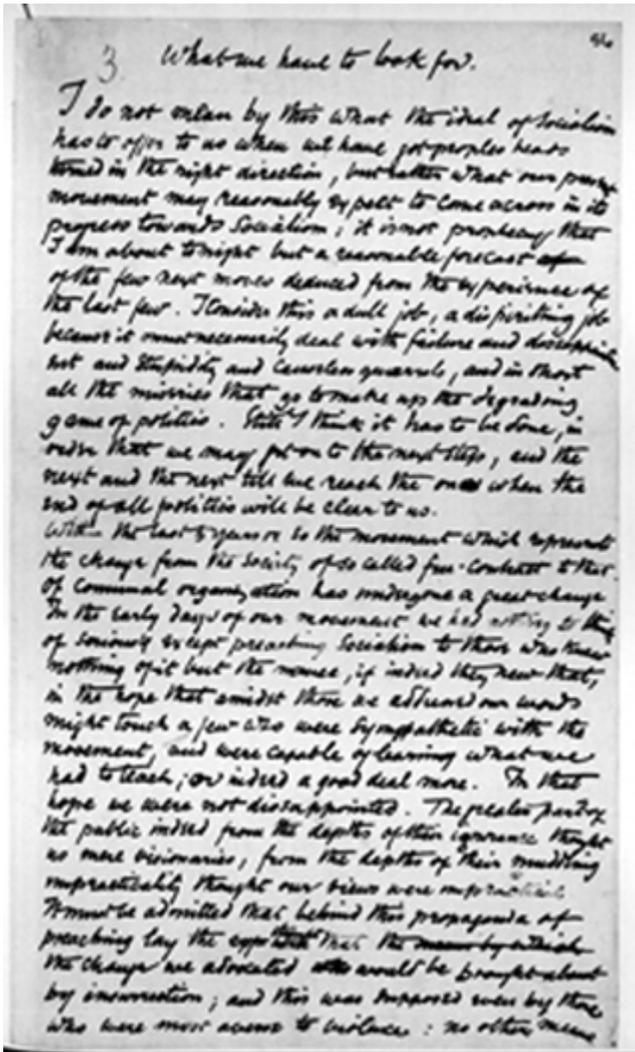


Figure 3—First page of manuscript for 'What We Have to Look For'; B. L. Add. Ms. 45:333, f. 56.

palliative changes in ordinary people’s lives. He began with an admission that his topic was ‘a dull job, a dispiriting job[,] because it must necessarily deal with failure and disappointment and stupidity and causeless quarrels, and in short all the miseries that go to make up the degrading game of politics’ [f. 56].

This statement stands in marked and somewhat poignant contrast with the ardour of the early days of the Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist League, when ‘we had nothing to think of seriously except preaching Socialism to those who knew nothing of it but the name ... ‘[W]e gained ... adherents, and good ones, and that more speedily than might have been expected ...’ [ff. 56, 57]. Early Socialists had also faced heavy resistance: ‘[F]rom the depths of their muddling impracticality [audiences] thought our views were impractical, [f. 56]’, but there had been a heartening change: ‘the number of those [who] can vaguely be classed as socialists has increased enormously, besides a very considerable increase in those who definitely profess Socialism’ [f. 58], [and] ... it has become a common-place that there is little difference between the two parties except that of ins & outs’ [f. 59]. Or as Old Hammond had put it in Chapter XIV of *News from Nowhere*:

... [the two major parties] only PRETENDED to this serious difference of opinion; for if it had existed they could not have dealt together in the ordinary business of life; couldn’t have eaten together, bought and sold together, gambled together, cheated other people together, but must have fought whenever they met: which would not have suited them at all. The game of the masters of politics was to cajole or force the public to pay the expense of a luxurious life and exciting amusement for a few cliques of ambitious persons: and the PRETENCE of serious difference of opinion, belied by every action of their lives, was quite good enough for that.<sup>1</sup>

More than one hundred and fifteen years later, such patterns are hauntingly familiar.

Drawing further on his personal experiences in the Socialist League, Morris observed that ‘election times were the very worst times for our propaganda: no one with any political bias could disentangle his thoughts and aspirations from the great party dog-fight which was going on ...’ [f. 59], and predicted that the Liberal party would eventually divide into two factions, one comprised of potential reactionaries, the other potential socialists. For no longer, he believed, was public opinion credulously trustful of the law of the markets (‘the old Manchester school, the utilitarian Laissez faire business’ [f. 59]):

... everywhere people are shaken as to their views of the eternity of the present system which was once as undoubted a fact to them as the existence of the sun in the heavens [f. 59].

But present-day socialists no longer believed in the imminence of revolution: 'Almost everyone[, moreover,] has ceased to believe in the change coming by catastrophe', a noticeable shift from a period in which [he and others] 'thought that the change we advocated would be brought about by insurrection; and this was supposed even by those who were most averse to violence: no other means seemed conceivable for lifting the intolerable load which lay upon us ...' [ff. 56–57].

Still, capitalism had not receded:

... there are the unemployed. Nothing has been done for them in the mass, and nothing will be done for them ... if [it] should [ever] come to be the case that [it] is understood that they who fail in the competition shall have places provided for them by the state, there will be a tendency for wages to fall amongst those who are generally employed ... [A]ll those measures for improving the material condition of the working classes without altering their positions ... [mean] more or less feeding the dog with his own tail [f. 60].

The Tories might 'make a showy benevolent present (which in the long run will be of no use to you) rather than yield a right however small' [f. 60], and the Liberals, under pressure, might make 'certain improvements in the present creaky and clumsy electoral machinery which will be of some use to you' [ff. 60–61], but such measures were inherently unstable, and Morris could not

... for the life of me see how the great change which we long for can come otherwise than by disturbance and suffering of some kind. Well, since battle also has been made a matter of commerce, and the God of War must now wear a mantle of bank-notes and be crowned with guineas, ... since war has been commercialized, I say, we shall ... not be called upon to gain our point by battle in the field. ... Can that combat be fought out[,] again I say[,] without loss and suffering? Plainly speaking I know that it cannot. [ff. 61–62]

In particular, Morris suggested that 'the Great Change' might not come as he had hoped in *News from Nowhere*: as a 'natural' synergetic result of non-violent resistance, anger at police repression, and emergence of new forms of organisation and governance in England's green and pleasant land.

Against this bleak prognosis, Morris saw only a few tenuous signs of hope. One was a growing 'spirit of antagonism to our present foolish[,] wasteful system

... and a sense of the unity of labour as against the exploiters of labour’. [f. 64] A second, more ambivalent sign was the overwhelming popular response to Robert Blatchford’s *Merrie England*, which eventually sold more than two million copies in Britain and the United States.<sup>2</sup> Blatchford, a professed admirer of Morris, was a member of the Independent Labour Party and an advocate of unity amongst the various factions of British socialism. But as its nostalgic title suggests, his treatise sidestepped deep questions of oppression, class-conflict, and means of effecting social change. To see why this wave of popular sentiment (in both senses of the word) must have bemused Morris as well as impressed, compare Blatchford’s rosewater characterisation of imperialism as the

present national ideal [which] is to become ‘The Workshop of the World.’ That is to say, the British people are to manufacture goods for sale to foreign countries, and in return for those goods are to get more money than they could obtain by developing the resources of their own country for their own use.

My ideal is that each individual should seek his advantage in co-operation with his fellows, and that the people should make the best of their own country before attempting to trade with other people’s.<sup>3</sup>

with the following passage from Chapter XV of *News from Nowhere*:

The appetite of the World-Market grew with what it fed on: the countries within the ring of ‘civilisation’ (that is, organised misery) were glutted with the abortions of the market, and force and fraud were used unsparingly to ‘open up’ countries OUTSIDE that pale.<sup>4</sup>

It was not trade with foreign nations which Morris decried, or developing the resources of their own country, but imperial domination, repression of native culture and rapacious extraction of raw materials.

As for the ideal of a single socialist party (cf. the Wobblies’ ‘one big union’), it *might*

... once formed ... not break up any existing bodies but include them, [and if so, it] would, it seems to me, have a claim on all genuine socialists, [but] ... until it is formed, though we may do good propagandist work we shall do nothing worth speaking of in the political way. [f. 67]

However, at the General Election of 1895, all twenty-eight ILP candidates failed to win a seat, and Morris counselled that formation of such a party might need to ‘wait till the general body of socialists see the futility of mere sections attempting to do the work of the whole mass properly organised’. [f. 66]<sup>5</sup> Well aware that Fabians, parliamentarians and members of the SDF disagreed, he enjoined his audience therefore to let others press for

... measures which may be for the temporary good of their class, which are but temporary and experimental, and adapted only for the present state of things, ... Let our liberal and radical ... friends make these experiments, and take all the responsibility for their failure, for in the long run fail they will' [f. 67].

What Morris sought was not a more comfortable 'machine life of the useful classes' [f. 67], but a genuine liberation—not a freedom 'to sleep under bridges' (in the words of Anatole France), or to choose one's tenth-generation form of interactive electronic entertainment, but a social order in which

those who wish to work happily and unwastefully, to restore what of the earth's surface which is spoilt and keep that which is unspoilt, to enjoy rest and thought and labour without fear or remorse[,] ... will be free because we are equal [ff. 67–68]

Morris was well aware that principled stands and 'negative capability' come more easily to comfortably situated dissidents ('In these matters I always think[,] what should I do myself; and I find it difficult to answer [that] question ...' [f. 64]). But he held firm to his lifelong conviction that the ultimate aim for *all* of us should be 'self-respect, happy and fit work, leisure, beautiful surroundings[—]in a word, the earth our own and the fullness thereof' [f. 64].

Given such utopian ideals, how might Morris have reacted to the contradictions and likely atrocities of 'socialist' revolutions in the wake of a disastrous capitalist conflicts such as the Great War of 1914–1918? He would, I believe, have been sickened by them—as was Emma Goldman by the despotic state-capitalism of the Soviet Union, and George Orwell by the betrayals of the Spanish Civil War. For however 'utopian' Morris may have been, he was no Blatchford. He understood how difficult it is to uphold egalitarian ideals against opportunist pressures to exploit peoples' legitimate fears and illegitimate prejudices. And he understood how readily the instruments of power corrupt revolutionaries as well as reformers, and induce them to condone forms of exploitation and inequities once decried. As his health declined, Morris admitted that he did not know how to break through these barriers. He could only urge his audience to confront them with critical intelligence, and with a measure of tempered hope.

NOTES

1. James Redmond, ed, *William Morris, News from Nowhere, or an epoch of rest*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970, p. 73. Afterwards *NfN*.
2. *Merrie England*, London: Clarion Newspaper Company, 1895, 172 pp. The preface to the 1895 edition notes that when this edition has been sold out, 875,000 copies will have been purchased since its first printing in October 1894. Eventually two million copies were reported as sold in Britain (Laurence Thompson, *Robert Blatchford: Portrait of an Englishman*, London: Victor Gollanz, 1957, p. 101). In addition, according to Jason Martinek (‘“The Workingman’s Bible”: Robert Blatchford’s “Merrie England”, Radical Literacy, and the Making of Debsian Socialism, 1895–1900’, *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, Vol. 2, No. 3, New Perspectives on Socialism I, July 2003, pp. 326–346), more than a million copies were reportedly sold in the United States.
3. *Merrie England*, chapter 2. In Chapter XV of *News from Nowhere*, Morris attacked the effects of global capitalism.
4. *NfN*, p. 80.
5. Three working-men had been successful in the General Election of 1892. The Independent Labour Party, led by Keir Hardie, was founded in 1893, and called for collective and communal ownership of production, distribution, and exchange. When, in 1906, a Labour Party was founded, the ILP became an affiliate.

‘WHAT WE HAVE TO LOOK FOR’

*B. L. Add. Manuscript 45,333, ff. 56–68*

[f.56] I do not mean by this what the ideal of Socialism has to offer to us when we have got people[']s heads turned in the right direction, but rather what our present movement may reasonably expect to come across in its progress towards Socialism; it is not prophecy that I am about tonight but a reasonable forecast of the few next moves deduced from the experience of the last few. I consider this a dull job, a dispiriting job[,] because it must necessarily deal with failure and disappointment and stupidity and causeless quarrels, and in short all the miseries that go to make up the degrading game of politics. Still I think it has to be done, in order that we may get on to the next step, and the next and the next till we reach the one when the end of all politics will be clear to us.

Within the last five years or so the movement which represents the change from the society of so called free-contract to that of communal organization has undergone a great change[.] In the early days of our movement we had nothing to think of seriously except preaching Socialism to those who knew nothing of it but the name, if indeed they [k]new that, in the hope that amidst those we addressed our words might touch a few who were sympathetic with the movement, and were capable of learning what we had to teach; or indeed a good deal more. In that hope we were not disappointed. The greater part of the public indeed from the depths of their ignorance thought us mere visionaries, from the depths of their muddling impracticality thought our views were impractical. It must be admitted that behind this propaganda of preaching lay the thought that the change we advocated would be brought about by insurrection; and this was supposed even by those who were most averse to violence: no other means [f. 57] seemed conceivable for lifting the intolerable load which lay upon us. We thought that every step towards Socialism would be resisted by the reactionaries who would use against [us] the legal executive force which was & is, let me say, wholly in the power of the possessing classes; that the wider the movement grew the more rigorously the authorities would repress it. And we were somewhat justified by their treatment of us; for while the movement was yet quite young the said authorities began to think that we were not only foolish but dangerous, which latter we may yet turn out to be, though not in the way which they meant by the word: hence all the stupid police interference with harmless meetings, and Black Monday and Bloody Sunday & the rest of it.<sup>1</sup>

Now there is another thing; we gained, as I said, adherents, and good ones, and that more speedily than might have been expected, because the spirit of Socialism was alive, and on the way, and only lacked, as it does now, the due body which would make it a powerful force. But for a long time we did not touch the very people whom we chiefly wanted to get at,—the working classes to wit. Of course there were many working-men amongst us, but they were there by dint of their special intelligence, or of their eccentricity; not as working-men simply. In fact as a friend of ours once said to me, we are too much a collection of *oddities*[.] Anyhow the great body of working men, and especially those belonging to the most organized industries[.] were hostile to Socialism: they did not really look upon themselves as a class, they identified their interests with those of their trade-union, their craft, their workshop or factory even: the capitalist system seemed to them, if not heaven-born, yet at least necessary, and undoubtedly indefeasible.

[f. 58] I don't know if we expected this, but I do not think it dispirited us, partly perhaps because we would not admit it, being sanguine to the verge of braggadocio[.] Well now[.] much of this is changed: the idea of successful insurrection within a measurable distance of time is only [in] the heads of the anarchists, who seem to have a strange notion that even equality would not be acceptable if [it] were not gained by violence only. Almost everyone has ceased to believe in the change coming by catastrophe. To state the position shortly, as a means to the realization of the new society Socialists

hope so far to conquer public opinion, that at last a majority of the parliament shall be sent to sit in the house as avowed Socialists and the delegates of Socialists, and on that should follow what legislation might be necessary[,] and moreover, though the time for this may be very far ahead, yet most people would now think that the hope of doing it is by no means unreasonable.

Next it is no longer the case that the working-classes are hostile to Socialism, they even vaguely approve of it generally, and from time [to time] to take action through strikes and other agitation which amounts to a claim to be recognized as citizens, and not looked upon as merely part of the machinery for profit-bearing production; [a]nd the number of those [who] can vaguely be classed as socialists has increased enormously,<sup>2</sup> besides a very considerable increase in those who definitely profess Socialism[;] and all this has produced so much impression on the possessing classes, that they are beginning to think of making some concessions in the direction, as they think, of Socialism, so long as it can be done ‘safely’.

Another change has taken place outside socialism amongst the ordinary politicians which has surely some relation to the movement; this is that the old political parties and their watch words are losing their importance. When we first began our Socialist work in London the two orthodox parties of Tories and Liberals were [f. 59] so completely prominent that no other possible party was thought of, and it is true that election times were the very worst times for our propaganda: no one with any political bias could disentangle his thoughts and aspirations from the great party dog-fight which was going on at such times. Now on the contrary it has become a common-place that there is little difference between the two parties except that of ins & outs, and many think even that more in the way of the concessions above said [may be gained] from the Tory party than the Liberal, which possibly may be the case, though I don’t think it will turn out so. On the other hand at present the Liberal party is losing ground and even tending towards break up, perhaps because it includes as nominal members men who may be called semi[-]socialists. If it does actually break up, the result will obviously be a coalition of the whiggish Liberals with the Tories, which would make a party strong enough to snap the fingers at socialism and refuse any concessions, and on the other hand the Radical tail setting itself up as a parliamentary party[,] which would be a very weak party while it lasted, and would tend to melt into the general advance of Socialism. Again whatever else has happened, or failed to happen[,] the old Manchester school,<sup>3</sup> the utilitarian Laissez faire business[,] has fallen a very short time after its entire acceptance as an indisputable theory by all would-be intelligent people. Doubtless all this[,] apart from whatever advance in the prospects of labour on which it is founded[,] means a great stir in thought and aspirations apart from the actual Socialist movement. It means that everywhere people are shaken as to their views of the eternity of the present system which was once as undoubted a fact to them as the existence of the sun in the heavens.

But what next? There cannot be a great upheaval and ferment in men's minds without [f. 60] something coming of it. But what has come of it as yet? In the first place has any increase in the material prosperity of the workman come of it[?] I do not think so. The strike war[,] taking it widely[,] is necessary certainly, but it has to be paid for. It has been necessary to call attention to the mass of unemployed amongst us. But there are the unemployed. Nothing has been done for them in the mass, and nothing will be done for them, because nothing can be done while the present system lasts. That there should be periodically people out of work who can work, is a necessity of the competition for employment under our present system; and surely if [it] should come to be the case that [it] is understood that they who fail in the competition shall have places provided for them by the state, there will be a tendency for wages to fall amongst those who are generally employed[.]

Now you will find that generally speaking this is the case with all those measures for improving the material condition of the working classes without altering their position; it all means more or less feeding the dog with<sup>4</sup> his own tail; you better the condition of one group of workers at the expense of the others: and thereby you make partial content out of general discontent, and hoodwink the people and prevent their action: divide to govern is a very old maxim of Scoundrelcraft. Now I gave you no reason when I said just now<sup>5</sup> that I did not believe that you would get more out of the Tories than the Liberals; but here is the reason ready to my hand; it is just this sort of concession which the Tories will give you: it is their instinct to make a showy benevolent present (which in the long run will be of no use to you) rather than yield a right however small. Of course from neither party can you expect any measure really socialistic, that is an impossibility, but by pressure you may get from the Liberals certain improvements [f. 61] in the present creaky and clumsy electoral machinery which will be of some use to you when you want to get M.Ps. to do your dirty work for you in Parliament.

No[,] I say you are not to expect from the rise of the battle [for] Socialism any serious improvement in the material condition of the working classes; you can only have that from Socialism, while the battle for Socialism is going on you can only have the hope of realizing Socialism. Indeed meantime I believe that the very upward movement of labour, the consciousness amongst working men that they should be citizens and not machines[,] will have to be paid for like other good things, and that the price will be no light one. I have thought the matter up and down and in and out, and I cannot for the life of me see how the great change which we long for can come otherwise than by disturbance and suffering of some kind. Well, since battle also has been made a matter of commerce, and the God of War must now wear a mantle of bank-notes and be crowned with guineas, since human valour must give way to the longest purse, and the latest invention (which I do not much complain of, since it makes it more difficult to exercise the accursed

art of destruction and slaughter)[,] since war has been commercialized, I say, we shall as above said not be called upon to gain our point by battle in the field.

But the disturbance and the suffering—can we escape that? I fear not. We are living in the commercial epoch of the world; and yet it would appear since I am talking to a socialist society, to an audience mainly socialist, in an epoch when commercialism has not all its own way, in an epoch in short when there is combat between Commercialism, or the system of reckless waste, and Communism or the system of neighborly common sense. Can that combat be fought out[, ] again I say[, ] without loss and suffering? [f. 62] Plainly speaking I know that it cannot. The rise in condition of life, if not in position[, ] of the working-classes must disturb the smooth going ways of the market, must reduce the profits of their employers, must reduce therefore their employing power, must reduce their spending power, and injure many forms of the production of useless articles, on which the working men largely live. What harm in that? You may say; none; it would be a gain if we were living in a socialist condition: but as we are now, it would mean the throwing out of work of numbers of industrious men, the greater part of whom, it would be very difficult to find employment for. Take a straw to show which way the wind blows. A few days ago I had a long letter from a lady whom I knew something of, once very rich, and the wife of a very rich manufacturer in Manchester: the drift of the letter was two-fold; 1st complaining of competition, and how they who once made a large profit on their works are now carrying them on at a loss. 2nd expostulating with me for stirring up the men to cry out for higher wages and the like, which injured the power of employment of the masters: the remedy for all being that the men should withdraw their demands [and] work with the employers who loved them so—and so forth and so forth. Well at first when I read the letter I was angry; then I laughed, and thought how true was the old saw: other people[']s troubles hang on a hair: and felt it as difficult to weep for this lady[']s troubles, as<sup>6</sup> she did for the lowered wages of her husband[']s hands & their diminished comforts. But do you know, at last I said to myself: after all she is right from her point of view; yes[, ] and perhaps from her men's point of view also; for I shall like to ask them, before [f. 63] I say anything about your tactics and your demands[, ] What is it that you really want[?] Yes, I should above all things like to have a genuine answer to this question; setting aside all convention, all rhetoric and flummery, what is it that you want from the present labour-movement? Higher wages; more regular employment? shorter working hours[, ] better education for your children[, ] old age pensions, libraries, parks & the rest[?] Are these things and things like them what you want? They are[, ] of course; but what else do you want[?] If you cannot answer that question straightforwardly I must say that you are wandering on a road the outcome of which you cannot tell; you cannot have any helpful politics or tactics. If you can answer it, and say yes, that is all we want: then I say here is

the real advice to give you: Don[']t you meddle with Socialism; make peace with your employers, before it is too late, and you will find that from them and their Committee, the House of Commons, you will get such measure of those things as will most probably content you, and at any rate all that they can give without ruining themselves[,] as they phrase it. If this is all you want[,] work with your employers & for them to your best [ability], consider their interests as well as your own[,] be careful not to try the markets over much, make sacrifices today that you may do well tomorrow[,] compete your best with foreign nations; pay the greatest attention to producing exactly what your markets demand and at the price they demand, and I think you will do well. I cannot indeed promise you, that you will bring back the prosperity of the country to the period of leaps & bounds, but you may well stave off the break down, which in these last years does really seem to be drawing near. [A]nd at any rate you will make the best of what prosperity there is left us as workmen and according to their standard of life.

If that is all you want how can we who are not [f. 64] workmen blame you? In these matters I always think[,] what should I do myself; and I find it difficult to answer the question here, What should I do? Wherefore I must own that sometimes when I am dispirited I think this is all that the labour movement means: it doesn't mean Socialism at all, it only means improvement in the condition of the working-classes: they will get that in some terms or another--till the break up comes; and it may be a long way ahead. And yet the workmen of this country seem to me to be going so very far from the right road to winning the slavish peace I have been speaking of, that I cannot think they mean nothing but that: imperfect, erring, unorganized, chaotic as that movement is, there is a spirit of antagonism to our present foolish[,] wasteful system in it, and a sense of the unity of labour as against the exploiters of labour which is the one necessary idea for those who are ever so little conscious of making toward Socialism. One thing alone would make me think that more is aimed at than<sup>7</sup> the stereotyping of a would be tolerable condition of servitude for the working-classes, and that is the success of our Comrade Blatchford[']s Merry England;<sup>8</sup> the thousands who have read that book must[,] if they have done so carefully[,] have found out that something better is possible to be thought of than the life of a prosperous mill-hand. For what after all is that something more than a low form of workman's prosperity[,] constant work, to wit, and a 'fair day's wages for a fair day[']s work.['] Surely it is nothing less than that which makes life worth living[:] Self-respect, happy and fit work, leisure, beautiful surroundings[–]in a word, the earth our own and the fullness thereof[,] and if nobody really dares to assert that this good life can be attained to, [let us maintain this aim] till we are essentially [f. 65] and practically Socialized[.] So I will indulge my hope that<sup>9</sup> all who call themselves Socialists, labour party, and even the fringe of all that would not be contented to make peace with the possessing classes {except} on the terms that all labour questions should

be thoroughly considered, that the interests of the working-men should be the first thing sought for, & so on; and that they really want to bring about Socialism, and are ready to face what may well be the temporarily disastrous effects of the rise of wages and all the detail that goes to make up the present labour war. And then comes the question; What is to be done? A question all the more necessary to ask since at present we are doing very little.

Now we must take it for granted that the first means[,] so to say[,] is as above stated, to conquer the general opinion of the country and gradually to get a majority in the House of Commons: and you must all remember that before that can be done, the thinking part of the population will have gone Socialist, so that nothing but the last act of the play will remain to be played.

Well that is the end, a long way off doubtless but in nowise an impossible end, a dream without form. What is to be done to get there? Well[,] first[,] what are the Socialist forces in this country? Answer two or three—say two bodies partly propagandist[,] partly with electoral views[,] probably of no great strength as to count of noses. More of them I won[']t say at present as I don[']t want to get into controversy as to their relative [merits]; so I will but note that there is at least rivalry between them and sometimes dissension. Besides these two bodies, there are no doubt many pronounced Socialists who are not attached to either, and there are also many who tend towards Socialism, and would be certain to be absorbed by [it] [f. 66] when it takes more definite action than it has yet done; but there is of course no means of finding out how many these unattached socialists and semi-socialists are.

Now what is to be done with these recruits, who are at present not generally acting together, and are for the most part pretty much undrilled? Well[,] are we to be a sect or a party? That is the next question: in that early time I spoke of<sup>10</sup> we were a sect and had no pretence to be a party, and did not need to be one. And mind you I don't mean the word sect to imply any blame or scorn. Sects have before now done a good deal towards forming the world[']s history: but you see we have settled that we want to go into parliament, and for that it seems to me a party is definitely necessary; that declaring ourselves socialists we shall formulate our immediate tactics toward that end: such a party once formed which would not break up any existing bodies but include them, would, it seems to me, have a claim on all genuine socialists, and one thing at least I am sure of[,] that until it is formed, though we may do good propagandist work we shall do nothing worth speaking of in the political way. My hope is, and if people really care for socialism enough, it will be realized, that we shall do so much propagandist work, and convert so many people to socialism[,] that they will insist on having a genuine Socialist Party which shall do the due work, and they will not allow the personal fads and vanities of leaders (so-called) to stand in the way of real business.

Well[,] it may be some time before we can have that party, because we shall



have to wait till the general body of socialists see the futility of mere sections attempting to do the work of the whole mass properly organized. Meantime what [f. 67] should be our tactics? I think that until we can do our party-work effectively, we had better leave off the pretence of doing it at all; that we had better confine ourselves to the old teaching & preaching of Socialism pure and simple, which is I fear more or less neglected amidst the said futile attempt to act as a party when we have no party. I think we have above all to point out to the working-men who feel Socialist sympathies, that there are many measures which may be for the temporary good of their class, which are but temporary and experimental, and adapted only for the present state of things, and that these are not for genuine Socialists to press forward. Let our Liberal and radical, and, if they will[,] our Tory friends make these experiments, and take all the responsibility for their failure, for in the long run fail they will. Our present system will admit of no permanent change in this direction. Unlimited competition, the laissez-faire of the old Manchester school, the privilege of the possessing class, modified if you will by gifts of the improved work-house kind—in a word once more the machine-life of the useful classes made as little burdensome to them as can be; that is all that can be got out of the present system. And again and again I say[,] if that is your ideal, don't fight against your employers, for you will but waste your livelihood by doing so.

But on the other hand, those who have a wild fancy to be free men, to have their affairs under their own control; those who wish to work happily and unwastefully, to restore what of the earth's surface<sup>11</sup> is spoilt and keep that which is unspoilt, to enjoy rest and thought and labour without fear or remorse[,] [f. 68] those in a word who wish to live like men, let them say, good wages or bad, good times or bad, good masters or bad, let us use them now as best we may, yet not so much for the present profit we may get out of them as for hastening the realization of the new Society, the time when at last we shall be free because we are equal.

[at bottom of page: March 30th, 1895, in Sidney Cockerell's hand]; (Figure 4)

[on f. 67v., notations, seemingly on the discussion which followed, with the topics raised by each speaker noted; includes floriated design]:<sup>12</sup>

Tochatti – to use our recruits when we've got them

Mordhurst the unemployed

Unknown Henry George and Cooperation

Unknown

Unknown as to society

Bullock giving up the problem Mercer

socialist representatives --

Unknown conscious or unconsciousness

Clergyman rather more depressed than I.

## NOTES

1. f. 57, Black Monday and Bloody Sunday—Demonstrations in Trafalgar Square in February 1886 and November 1887 had led to violence. During the former, peaceful meetings in Trafalgar Square and Hyde Park were followed by the smashing of windows; during the latter, two thousand police and four hundred soldiers attacked an unarmed crowd gathered to protest against coercion in Ireland. In the resulting mêlée, at least three demonstrators were killed and several dozen wounded.
2. The version used by May Morris (*Artist, Writer, Socialist*, Vol. II, p. 360) inserts after ‘increased’ a passage which in the British Library manuscript is placed later: ‘the condition of one group of workers at the expense of others; and thereby you make a partial content out of general discontent, and hoodwink the people, and prevent their action: “divide and govern” being a very old maxim of Scoundrels-craft’. [Cf. f. 60; Morris’s version reads ‘divide to govern’.]
3. See Note 7, p. 35.
4. Ms, ‘with of his own tail’.
5. Ms, an extra ‘when I said’ added.
6. Ms, ‘and’.
7. Ms, ‘that’.
8. f. 64, Merrie England—Robert Blatchford (1851–1943), a journalist, socialist campaigner, and novelist, was an admirer of *News from Nowhere* and founding editor of the socialist journal *The Clarion*. Blatchford’s *Merrie England* sold two million-odd copies in the U.K. (Laurence Thompson, *Robert Blatchford: Portrait of an Englishman*, London: Victor Gollanz, 1957, p. 101) as well as many more in the United States. Chris Waters (‘William Morris and the Socialism of Robert Blatchford’, *Journal of the William Morris Society*, V, 1982, pp. 20–31) has observed that ‘[b]oth [men] shared the conviction that the morally transformed life played a crucial role in the battle for socialism ... [and] believed that the most important duty of socialists was education, to make more socialists.’ (p. 22). By 1892 the Hammersmith Socialist Society had begun to sell *The Clarion* at its meetings (p. 21), and when (in 1894) Blatchford proposed the founding of a united socialist party, Morris expressed interest, though in the event this group failed to materialise.
9. Ms, ‘the’ inserted before ‘all’.
10. Ms, ‘off’.
11. Ms, ‘surface which is’.
12. Discussants mentioned at end of essay: (1) James Tochatti. A Canadian, born in Ballater, New Brunswick in 1852, Tochatti was a tailor, lecturer and lifelong campaigner for communist anarchism. An active public speaker and

member of the Hammersmith branch, he represented the Hammersmith branch at the League Conference in 1886, and contributed many notes and articles to *Commonweal*. (2) C(laude) Henry Mordhurst. A founding member of the Socialist League, Mordhurst was an energetic outdoor speaker and member of the Hammersmith branch who remodelled its premises in various ways, and served on its committees.