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# ‘The only word he was comfortable with’: William Morris and the Return of Communism

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**T**his article is going to be an exercise in what one might term political philology; and I feel that this is appropriate to this *Journal* because philology, apart from being one of the great nineteenth-century human sciences, mattered a lot to William Morris and his circle.<sup>1</sup> One book that made quite an impact on them in their younger years was Richard Chevenix Trench’s *On the Study of Words*, which was published in 1851. The book is a series of lectures with such titles as ‘On the Morality in Words’, ‘On the History in Words’, ‘On the Rise of New Words’, ‘On the Distinction of Words’, and, rather oddly, ‘The Schoolmaster’s Use of Words’. It still makes a lively read, and one learns a lot from it, so if you happen across the old Everyman reprint in a second-hand bookshop, I recommend that you shell out a couple of pounds and buy it. I am going to adopt something like Trench’s philological methodology here, and say a good deal about the morality, history and distinction of words, or at least of one or two key political words. I will not focus on ‘The Rise of New Words’, as Trench does, but shall ask instead whether we can make old words do radically new work.

Professionally, I am a teacher of literature, so I am speaking here initially as a literary critic, and it certainly seems to be the case that nearly all my favourite critics at one point or another in their careers have felt themselves obliged to trespass on the terrain of philology, and look very closely not at whole novels or plays or poems but at individual words. William Empson in 1951 gave us what is still a very brilliant and challenging book called *The Structure of Complex Words*, looking at such terms as ‘wit’, ‘all’, ‘fool’, ‘dog’, ‘honest’ and ‘sense’ across the range of English literature. C.S. Lewis, in his *Studies in Words* of 1961, examines such terms as ‘nature’, ‘sad’, ‘free’, ‘simple’, ‘life’, ‘world’ and, less predictably, the phrase ‘I dare say’; and finally Raymond Williams, in his brilliant and compact semantic dictionary *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* of 1976, takes us closer to the kind of sociological and political

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terrain that will be of interest to Morrisians, with his trenchant analyses of such terms as ‘aesthetic’, ‘capitalism’, ‘culture’, ‘intellectual’, ‘nature’, ‘romantic’ and many others. Williams’s volume has indeed proved to be more than just a book; it has instead become a collective project to which many people are contributing. Tony Bennett and others brought out a volume entitled *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* in 2005, and there is now a website devoted to this project too.<sup>2</sup> ‘Culture’ was Williams’s own most famous single word, from his first great intervention *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (1958) onwards. *Keywords*, meanwhile, contains the term that I want to focus on in this article, the word ‘communism’, which is certainly also a ‘complex’ word, though not perhaps in the sense that William Empson means in his book of that title.

My more local, Morrisian starting point is a remark that Phillippa Bennett made in this *Journal* in her Summer 2012 review of the American scholar Robert Boenig’s edition of *The Wood beyond the World*. As an enthusiast for the late romances, she was of course delighted to see a new edition of one of these works, but she also offers an important political caveat about the editorial material that Boenig has draped around the core text. She writes: ‘[t]he word Communism appears to be studiously avoided in relation to Morris, with the more palatable Socialism being the sole term of choice, although Boenig is by no means alone in the world of Morris scholarship in demonstrating that preference’.<sup>3</sup> The format of a brief review does not give Bennett space to go into this matter further, so we do not get what we might well have wished: a list of the other offenders that she may have had in mind here.

Is it, one wonders, because Boenig is American that ‘communist’ is such a difficult term for him, since out there, as we know, it is a term of rabid right-wing political abuse? Even ‘liberal’ can be used pretty venomously in the United States, so ‘communist’ is, even today, long after the collapse of the Soviet Union, way off the spectrum; and as an American academic it might therefore be a term you would not be keen to associate with your favourite author, for whose unfamiliar works you were trying to get a friendly hearing. I know that when I lecture on *News from Nowhere* in the second-year undergraduate Victorian Literature course at my university, the visiting American students in the audience look decidedly uncomfortable and shuffle in their seats when I declare to them that its author was a communist. Perhaps they feel that the National Security Agency is at that very moment hacking their smartphones to track their presence at a subversive lecture.

However, the problem that Phillippa Bennett identifies – whereby a more palatable term replaces the word Communism – is not specific to the United States; and I can offer you an instance from my own experience, from the run-up to The William Morris Society’s Symposium on *William Morris in the 21st Century*, which took

place in Birmingham during September 2015. I had therefore better name no names here – not just out of diplomacy and the milk of human kindness, but because it is a general linguistic phenomenon, an almost anonymous process, rather than the acts of individuals, on which I want to focus. When invited to contribute to the symposium, I replied that I would like to talk about ‘William Morris and the Return of Communism’. So imagine my bemusement when some weeks later I saw the Symposium advertised on the Society website, and it there said: ‘Tony Pinkney will reassess Morris’s Marxism’. The same wording is used in the printed Society programme for July to December. Well, ‘Morris’s Marxism’? That wasn’t the word I had used; no one had checked with me that I was happy with that change or offered any reasons for making it; it just seemed to happen of itself somehow – as Robert Boenig, presumably without even thinking about it, had just repeatedly self-censored and put ‘Socialism’ in his text every time that ‘Communism’ might have served.

Now I would obviously agree that, in my case, Marxism and Communism are not unrelated terms, particularly for Morris himself. Karl Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* made a powerful impact upon him, along with various other writings by Marx, and the *Manifesto* is indeed quoted in the 1885 Socialist League manifesto which Morris and Ernest Belfort Bax drafted together. Nonetheless, I think that, on the whole, the word Marxism names an intellectual system, about which you can have intellectual opinions about its correctness or otherwise; whereas Communism is the name of a worldwide transformative political movement that, during the twentieth century, was indelibly associated with the achievements but also with the massive crimes of Stalin and Mao. So when my proposed paper on Morris and the Return of Communism metamorphosed into ‘re-assessing Morris’s Marxism’, I think that, as with Robert Boenig, we have another case where a more palatable term has substituted itself for an uncomfortable one. I say ‘substituted itself’, thus removing conscious human agency from the process, because I do not suppose that the Morris Society Committee sat down collectively and said: ‘Oh dear, “communism”, we can’t have that term on the website, let’s find an alternative’. I imagine that the substitution just somehow happened of itself, because it is a general linguistic or ideological phenomenon that we are talking about here.

So it seems difficult now to talk about Morris as a communist, and, in fact, you almost cannot do it, as I hope my two examples have suggested. I think that it is therefore worth recollecting that, once upon a time, it was not at all difficult to describe Morris as a communist. Indeed it was almost taken as a matter of course to do so. Robert Blatchford declared in the *Clarion* newspaper in 1899: ‘I am, and always have been, a communist of the William Morris type’.<sup>4</sup> George Bernard Shaw, who had been very close to Morris in the 1880s, announced in 1934 that ‘Morris, when he had to define

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himself politically, called himself a Communist [...]. He knew that the essential term, etymologically, historically, and artistically, was Communist; and it was the only word he was comfortable with'.<sup>5</sup> In his 1959 lecture on 'The Communism of William Morris', E.P. Thompson describes Morris as 'the greatest moral initiator of Communism within our tradition'; and even in the 1976 Postscript to his great Morris biography, written when Thompson himself had left the British Communist Party, he still unembarrassedly declares that 'William Morris was an outstanding member of the first generation of European Communist intellectuals, the friend of Engels'.<sup>6</sup> From within a more literary-critical tradition, Norman Talbot as late as 1990 celebrates Morris as 'the first great English man of letters to declare himself a Communist'.<sup>7</sup>

But never mind the words that other people have used to describe Morris and his politics; we need of course to ask: how did he describe himself? It is not, obviously enough, simply wrong to refer to Morris as a socialist. After all, his own political organisation, set up during December 1884, was called the Socialist League, and he gave many lectures with titles such as 'Art and Socialism' or 'What Socialists Want'. He also published a celebrated account of 'How I Became a Socialist' in *Justice* during June 1884. He certainly did all that; but he also declared in *Commonweal* on 18 May 1889: 'I will begin by saying that I call myself a Communist, and have no wish to qualify that word by joining any other to it'.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, he published an article entitled 'Why I am a Communist' in *Liberty*, which was issued in 1894 as a penny pamphlet; and he gave a lecture on 'Communism' to the Hammersmith Socialist Society in March 1893. I would very much like to see both of these texts brought out as a pamphlet by the Morris Society, by the way.

Or let us look at the evidence of his politically inspired literary works. In *The Pilgrims of Hope* one of the hero Richard's workmates invites him to come to a political meeting at which the speaker 'is one of those Communist chaps, and 'tis like that you two may agree'. That is only a minor character speaking, and perhaps he is using terms loosely, so maybe it is unwise to give too much weight to that one use of the adjective. But just a few pages later, after Richard has been politically energised by a speaker who looks remarkably like Morris himself, he tells us that: 'When I joined the Communist folk, I did what in me lay/ To learn the grounds of the faith. I read day after day'. So he certainly regards himself as committed to communism, and I suspect the word here has a rather scary edge to it, and that his use of the more homely term 'folk', which he attaches to it, is an attempt to domesticate those dangerous connotations. As developments in Europe become more politically fraught but also promising, the same formulation comes up again in the poem: 'For Paris drew near to its fall, and wild hopes 'gan to flit/ Amidst us Communist folk'.<sup>9</sup> The three main characters in the poem, Richard, his wife and her lover Arthur do indeed end up

fighting for the Paris Commune in that city, after which, as Raymond Williams reminds us in *Keywords*, the terms ‘Communist’ and ‘Communard’ were virtually interchangeable.<sup>10</sup>

Or let us extract the uses of ‘communist’ and ‘communism’ in *News from Nowhere* to get a sense of just how active they are in Morris’s utopia. In the transfigured London and Thames valley of the book, William Guest finds himself ‘amidst ‘the present rest and happiness of complete Communism’.<sup>11</sup> Enlightened men in the late Victorian period, old Hammond tells him, concluded that ‘the only reasonable condition of Society was that of pure Communism (such as you now see around you)’.<sup>12</sup> Narrating the revolution, he then speaks of ‘the spread of communistic theories [...] a simple condition of Communism [...] the Communism which now loomed [...] a system of life founded on equality and Communism’.<sup>13</sup> Chapter Fifteen is entitled ‘On the Lack of Incentive to Labour in a Communist Society’, and as Hammond describes the operation of local democracy in *Nowhere* he asks Guest ironically: ‘a terrible tyranny our Communism, is it not?’<sup>14</sup> This final question points us precisely towards the difficulties that twentieth-century political history would pose around this term. But even so, you can see how pervasive the term communist is for describing the fully utopian world presented to us in the book, and this is why I have elsewhere criticised David Leopold, editor of the Oxford World’s Classics edition of *News from Nowhere*, which is in most respects far and away the best contemporary version.<sup>15</sup> In his introduction to that edition Leopold consistently uses the word socialist to describe Morris’s political views, rather than ‘communist’, which is the book’s own term for its offered world, and this is in my view another symptomatic moment in which the troubling term communist is silently erased whilst a more palatable one is put in its place.

Did Morris want *News from Nowhere* to be thought of as a socialist utopia? Did he want that particular adjective applied to it? Well, if so, he surely missed a great opportunity to enforce that identification in the opening lines of the book, which, as you will recall, run as follows: ‘[u]p at the League, says a friend, there had been one night a brisk conversational discussion, as to what would happen on the Morrow of the Revolution’.<sup>16</sup> Up at the League, okay, but *which* League? Why does Morris choose not to say ‘Socialist League’ here? One answer might be that, given that the first publication of *News from Nowhere* was in serial form in *Commonweal* across 1890, he simply did not need to specify the particular League to which he referred. *Commonweal* was the journal of the Socialist League, and many of those initial readers would have been members of it, so Morris could take it totally for granted that everyone would know he had the Socialist League in mind here.

Okay, I will concede that; but what happens when the serialised text is published

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in book form the following year, by Reeves and Turner? At that point Morris's utopia is out there in the wider literary world, and most of its purchasers will not be members of the Socialist League, and may indeed never have heard of that numerically very small organisation. What will those readers, and then subsequent readers up to our own time, make of the opening phrase 'Up at the League'? I imagine they will suspend judgement as to which League this might be, and read on a bit. As they do so they will encounter these lines in the second paragraph: 'there were six persons present, and consequently six sections of the party were represented, four of which had strong but divergent Anarchist opinions'. Ah, the middle-class reader might well think at this point, 'if four out of the six people present, i.e., sixty-six per cent of them, are Anarchists, then presumably this is an Anarchist League that we are talking about'; and I do think that, on the textual evidence given, this is a plausible hypothesis. A more learned reader, who was well up in his or her mid-nineteenth-century radical history, might, however, fleetingly wonder whether this is not, in fact, a Communist League being described (with, admittedly, a great deal of anarchist infiltration); for there had after all been a Communist League during the 1840s, and it was indeed for that very organisation that Marx and Engels wrote *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848.

My point here is that, at this crucial initial moment in his utopia, Morris leaves matters open; he had the chance to firmly specify the Socialist League, and he chose not to do so. He leaves the political nomenclature of this meeting open, indeterminate, undecidable; all we get is that phrase 'Up at the League', which politically can go in several directions. So if Morris is not keen to impose 'Socialist' as a governing global label for this text right from the start, then I think critics, scholars and editors should also be more cautious with that term, and more open to other possibilities of political naming.

We are treading on delicate semantic ground here, and we have to be aware that our own sense of the terms 'socialism' and 'communism' may not be what these terms pointed towards, or how they *felt*, during the nineteenth century. I certainly found it both surprising and salutary to turn to Raymond Williams's entry on 'communism' in *Keywords*. For we find this: '*communist* was still quite widely understood, in English, in association with *community* and thus with experiments in common property. In English, in the 1880s, *socialism* was almost certainly the harder word, since it was unambiguously linked, for all its varying tendencies, to reorganization of the society as a whole'.<sup>17</sup> Williams offers no documentary evidence here, since *Keywords* is just a compact semantic dictionary, but obviously the author of *Culture and Society 1780-1950* is a weighty commentator in these matters. How, I wonder, would we invent a methodology that might test Williams's philological claim, that socialism was indeed the harder word in the England of the 1880s? What exactly does 'harder' mean here, after all – politically frightening, intellectually systemic, both? To be sure, we should not project

twentieth-century meanings of communism and socialism back onto the debates of the 1880s, but even so, for Morris socialism is clearly a transitional stage on the way to full communism, so for him, at least, I am still inclined to think that communism is the ‘harder’, i.e. the more thorough-going, word. As I have shown already, in looking at *The Pilgrims of Hope*, its disturbing force has to be consciously tempered in that poem by having the homely, genial term ‘folk’ attached to two of its three uses.

If, then, as a matter of historical accuracy, communism and communist are the terms we should be using for Morris’s political vision, the terms that he himself uses in his finest literary works, then why are we no longer doing so? The answer is not far to seek. The term communism has been thoroughly demonised by its political enemies, and the Left has internalised this judgement. The crimes of Stalin and Mao are, in the eyes of our political opponents, not just contingent, not a matter of a historical deformation of the initial project, but, rather, built into the very idea of communism from the start – part of its DNA, as it were. The notion of a Leninist vanguard Party which has to import or inject communism into a working class which is only capable under its own resources of ‘trade-union consciousness’ has, it is argued, the seeds of domination and violence built into it from the very beginning.

At which point the Left, demoralised by both the bloody history of Soviet and Chinese Communism, and by these counter-revolutionary arguments about such violence being inherent in Communism, has switched to the term ‘socialism’, and redefined its project as social democracy, aiming to contain, rather than overthrow, capitalism. The highlight of social democracy for us in this country, I suppose, was the Labour election victory of 1945 with the nationalisation of key industries and the institution of the welfare state. What we have seen more recently, however, in the epoch of postmodern or post-Fordist or globalised or neo-liberal capitalism, is that these social-democratic parties have moved further and further, not just to the centre, but even to the right, to the point where the term ‘socialism’ today is, I submit, almost vacuous – just take a look at François Hollande and his so-called Parti Socialiste in France. Far from challenging post-2008 neo-liberal austerity, these parties are, when they can, actively imposing and managing it, albeit in a slightly more humane form than their conservative opponents. So I suggest that if communism has been demonised by its opponents, socialism has simultaneously emptied itself out as a political term, and is in some danger of becoming the most non-meaning of political signifiers; and at such a moment, in such a predicament, opposition necessarily comes from unexpected, non-systemic sources, such as the Occupy movement for that brief moment of its glory during autumn 2011.

But with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc, and with the great Western financial crisis of 2008 finally putting paid to notions of the ‘end of history’,

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we can perhaps return to the term ‘communism’ without having our thinking frozen by Leninist versions of its meaning, or Stalinist and Maoist nightmares of its practical effects. Can this key term, we need to ask ourselves, be de-demonised, in and for our time? For without the invention of a new idea of communism, we may be confined indefinitely to the bloody struggle between an aggressive but very unstable Western neo-liberalism and a global movement of Islamic fanaticism and terror. We very desperately need a new third term to take us beyond that frozen and murderous antithesis.

Now we are, in my view, not only in a new political epoch where the term communism might conceivably become usable again, and is certainly urgently needed; rather, it is, in fact, *already* being newly employed, put to work in new, post-Leninist ways. The French philosopher Alain Badiou, with his announcement of the ‘communist hypothesis’, and the Slovenian theorist Slavoj Žižek are perhaps the best-known spokespeople for this trend, though Jodi Dean’s book *The Communist Horizon* is a very trenchant exposition of it too.<sup>18</sup> At a conference on ‘The Idea of Communism’ held at the Institute of Education in London during March 2009 some nine hundred people joined Žižek and others in this joint political and theoretical endeavour; its proceedings were published by Verso in 2010.<sup>19</sup> There were successful follow-up conferences on the same topic in Berlin during 2010, and in New York during 2011.

I do not have time or space to go into the detail of this work in this context. Nor am I saying that these various contemporary communist thinkers are easily compatible with each other; that some comfortably shared new collective paradigm has emerged. Badiou’s communist hypothesis, for example, is just part of a much broader and highly complex philosophical system which he has elaborated, on a challenging mathematical basis, over many decades; and even I, despite being both a non-mathematician and a non-philosopher, can see some rather substantial problems with it. But I do just want to evoke this field of work in these very general terms, in order to suggest that if we start thinking again about William Morris as a communist, as a pre-Leninist communist, then we might find ways of making his thought politically active again in our present as part of this early twenty-first-century effort to define what a *post-Leninist* communism might look like, what its values would be, in what kind of political vehicle it might embody itself, how it might relate to such recent oppositional moments as the Occupy movement or the Arab Spring, or Podemos or Syriza in Europe, and so on. To think of Morris as a communist is not simply a matter of historical accuracy, it is much more a way of looking forward, of trying to insert him into our contemporary political and cultural discourse; and when you look at how powerful neo-liberalism still is, despite its great crisis of 2008, and when you see how disorientated much of the Left still seems to be – consider the political fate of Syriza in Greece, after all – then heaven knows, we need Morris and

his utopianism in refurbished form to keep us going.

Having reflected on the political and intellectual consequences of beginning to think seriously of Morris as a communist again, I want to end with some thoughts about the more local institutional consequences of doing so, about what it might mean for The William Morris Society itself. There are two dimensions to this issue, I think, one historical and one contemporary, with the former – the historical investigation – giving us our bearings for possible implications in the present. I would hope that many people here will have read Martin Crick’s splendid *History of the William Morris Society*, published for the Society’s fiftieth anniversary during 2005. In that very rich survey of so many aspects of the Society’s activities since 1955, there are a few key pages on – to use Crick’s own heading – ‘The William Morris Society and the Communist Party’. He argues that ‘[c]learly the initial impetus for the formation of a Morris Society had come from the CP and although this organised attempt did not bear fruit the key figures in the eventual establishment of the Society were Party members. Membership of the early committees was dominated by Communists or Communist sympathisers, most of whom knew each other. Members such as Barbara Morris, Godfrey Rubens and Ray Watkinson sold the *Daily Worker* together’.<sup>20</sup>

However, this powerful Communist presence in the early Society did not have the kind of political impact one might have expected; for as Crick notes just a few lines later: ‘there is nothing to suggest that there was an organised attempt to control the Society [...]. It is noticeable that Morris’s political beliefs did not dominate the Society’s activities in its early years, and they were far from prominent in the pages of the *Journal* or the *Newsletter*. Those who tried to argue for the Society’s involvement in political issues were largely unsuccessful’.<sup>21</sup> So one has to conclude, I think, either that these early Morrisian Communists were a half-hearted and disorganised bunch, unable to sustain what Lenin used to call the ‘iron discipline of the Party’ in their dealings with the Society, or – which seems to me rather more likely – that they had decided to ‘go easy’ on Morris’s Communism, and the political direction of the Society, in order to sustain good relations with its socialist or liberal members, and build it up in a more politically neutral manner; they would also, of course, necessarily have been unsettlingly caught up in the internal Party crisis after Nikita Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin in February 1956 and the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising later that year.

Another significant event for the fledgling Morris Society is noted by Martin Crick a page or two earlier in his *History*: ‘[i]n November 1958 the Inland Revenue agreed to recognise the Society as a charity, which allowed members to covenant their fees’.<sup>22</sup> I am not an expert on the history of charity law, but I cannot imagine that an explicitly political, actively campaigning Communist William Morris Society would have

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succeeded in gaining charitable status back then. So my hunch is that the Communist committee members, caught up anyway in a difficult Party crisis, were probably going easy on their politics in order at least in part to facilitate the application for charity status; and once you gain that status, with all its financial benefits, you are then bound by charity law with its legal restrictions on political activity, so the more liberal wing of the Society will then have a formidable weapon to invoke against you if you do try to assert your Communism more actively thereafter. What one might have thought was just a neutral financial matter or manoeuvre actually turns out to have a conservative political momentum of its own.

Now what I want to argue is that the early Communist figures in the Morris Society made a mistake in adopting this policy of – what shall we call it? – political neutrality and disarmament, or ‘abstention’ even, to borrow one of Morris’s own terms. In my view, they should have taken over the Society fully, and operated it under a guiding vision of Morris-as-Communist (which is not necessarily the same as operating it as a Communist Party cultural sub-group). That particular historical moment has long since gone, and the original British Communist party itself no longer exists. But charitable status, for all its undoubted financial benefits to the Morris Society over the decades, continues to hamper its political profile. When discussions about a new editor for the *Journal* were under way during 2015 I put forward a radical proposal for reforming the *Journal*, and I gather that one of the objections from the Morris Society Committee which eventually scuppered this plan was that we would no longer be meeting the educational purposes which our charitable status enjoined upon us.<sup>23</sup> My own sense is that charity law basically rules out narrowly party-political activity, not political and campaigning activity as such (although this may be about to change).<sup>24</sup> However, I would accept that there is probably little appetite among the existing membership and the officers of the Society for returning to what might have been briefly possible during the 1950s, i.e., a Communist Morris Society.

However, I do not think that those of us who believe 1. that Morris himself was a communist, and 2. that communism is a vitally important contemporary term and project can just remain content with the status quo. Therefore I would like to test the waters by making a proposal: that we launch a new Morris Society, or something very like it, which would be dedicated to these two propositions – Morris as Communist and a new Communism for the twenty-first century – and to exploring the relationship between them. And in making such a proposal I believe that I am operating in a very Morrisian spirit; after all, for him, too, when one organisation no longer works for your chosen purposes, you form a new one. When the Social-Democratic Federation under H.M. Hyndman ceased to be doing what Morris and his closest allies believed a party of the Left should be doing, they upped sticks and

left, forming the Socialist League at the end of 1884; and when some years later the League had been taken over by anarchists, then, once again, Morris decided that it was time to move on, and he set up the Hammersmith Socialist Society. I am not suggesting that we communist Morrisians necessarily have to leave the existing Society, but I definitely do believe that we need an additional network devoted to explicitly political concerns and activities.

So I propose that we explore the possibility of a new grouping to be called something like the William Morris Communism Network or perhaps the William Morris Communism Project. It might have a membership fee of its own, it would run a modest number of events both nationally and internationally, and it would perhaps start its own newsletter which might hopefully, in the fullness of time, metamorphose into a journal. And it would crucially *not* seek charity status, not ever. One starting point for these events might be a reinvention of that annual celebration of the Paris Commune which Morris and his comrades regularly attended year in year out through the 1880s; for a powerful historical and theoretical reflection on the Paris Commune would be an important learning experience for the various protest movements of today – and a stern reminder, like Chapter Seventeen of *News from Nowhere*, of just how savage ruling classes can be when they feel their dominance is genuinely challenged. Never mind Boris Johnson's water cannon for London; in the case of the Paris Commune, we are talking about some 25,000 workers murdered in the streets of the city as reaction unleashed its full brutality.

So I rest my case, comrades. I hope that I have persuaded you that the term communism has largely vanished from Morris studies today, and that it needs to be brought back. This is because, firstly, as a matter of historical and philological accuracy, Morris was a Communist, although of a pre-Leninist variety, naturally. Secondly, it is because in thinking of him as a communist again we may be able to find fruitful ways to bring his artistic and political activity, and above all his utopian thinking, into relation to some of the most productive communist thinking of our own time – and if you are not a communist, then I believe, as Alain Badiou argues, that you always sooner or later make your peace with capitalism, in one complex form or another. And, thirdly, I suggest that in order to achieve this transformation in our sense of Morris and his current political value, we need a new vehicle for that vision. A moment was missed during the 1950s when we might have had a Communist Morris Society, albeit in a restricted, Leninist understanding of the term, but that should not constrain us now from exploring the possibility of creating a new group, an international William Morris Communism Network, to take forward the kind of vision and work I have been recommending to you here.

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## NOTES

1. This article was first delivered as a paper at The William Morris Society Symposium on *William Morris in the Twenty-First Century*, held in Birmingham on 5 September 2015. It has been slightly revised for publication, but it is worth noting that the political background to this event – not really registered in my text itself – was Jeremy Corbyn's very lively and (as we could not know on the day itself) ultimately successful campaign for the leadership of the Labour Party. Given the topic of this paper, I dedicate it to the memory of my grandfather Henry Smith Pinkney (1894-1968), miner and Communist.
2. The website for the Keywords Project is available online: <[http://keywords.pitt.edu/williams\\_keywords.html](http://keywords.pitt.edu/williams_keywords.html)> (accessed 11 July 2017).
3. Phillippa Bennett, review of Robert Beonig, *JWMS*, 19: 4 (Summer 2012), 85-86.
4. Cited in Noel Thompson, *Political Economy and the Labour Party*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 20
5. George Bernard Shaw, 'William Morris as I Knew Him', in *William Morris: Artist Writer Socialist*, ed. by May Morris, 2 vols (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1936), II, p. ix.
6. E.P. Thompson, *The Communism of William Morris* (London: The William Morris Society, 1965), p. 19; E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, 2nd rev. edn (London: Merlin, 1977), p. x.
7. Norman Talbot, 'A Guest in the Future', in *Socialism and the Literary Artistry of William Morris*, ed. by Florence Boos and Carole Silver (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), p. 38.
8. William Morris, *Political Writings: Contributions to 'Justice' and 'Commonweal' 1883-1890*, ed. by Nicholas Salmon (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994), p. 414.
9. *Three Works by William Morris*, ed. by A.L. Morton (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1977), pp. 136, 143, 161.
10. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. edn (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1983), p. 74.
11. William Morris, *News from Nowhere*, ed. by David Leopold (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 160. (Afterwards Morris, *News from Nowhere*).
12. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 94, 103, 110.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
15. See my 'William Morris Communist 2', *William Morris Unbound* (blog), 1 October 2012, available online: <<http://williammorrisunbound.blogspot.co.uk/2012/10/william-morris-communist-2.html>> (accessed 11 July 2017). Leopold defends his position in the comments to this post.
16. Morris, *News from Nowhere*, p. 3.
17. Williams, *Keywords*, p. 74.
18. Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (London: Verso, 2010); Slavoj Žižek, *In Defence of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008); Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (London: Verso, 2012).
19. Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek, eds, *The Idea of Communism* (London: Verso, 2010).
20. Martin Crick, *History of the William Morris Society* (London: William Morris Society, 2012), pp. 38-39.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
23. See my 'Project for a new Journal', *William Morris Unbound* (blog), 12 January 2015, available online: <<http://williammorrisunbound.blogspot.co.uk/2015/01/project-for-new-journal.html>> (accessed 11 July 2017).
24. One might, for example, look to the kinds of deeply political and campaigning activity undertaken by charitable organisations such as War on Want or Greenpeace.