

‘Monopoly: Or How Labour is Robbed’: a bibliographical note

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‘Monopoly: Or How Labour is Robbed’ was first published in *Commonweal* on 7, 14 and 21 December, 1889. It later appeared as a pamphlet in 1890, along with a cartoon by Walter Crane.

It originated as an ‘extempore’ lecture, delivered by William Morris on February 20th, 1887, to the Mitcham Branch of the Socialist League.¹ He refined it over a second meeting before giving a definitive version during an evening sponsored by the Chiswick Club, at Chiswick Hall, one month later. He subsequently gave it on at least twenty-two more occasions.²

At Chiswick, he thought his audience had difficulties with the content:

I really did my best; but they hung on my words, heavy as lead ...³

But by October of that year he told William Sharman that he wished to substitute ‘Monopoly’ for ‘Art and Industry in the Fourteenth Century’ amongst his regular repertoire.⁴ On March 6th 1888, he told John Glasse that it was “my best lecture”, and on the 17th that, of those he had available, “Monopoly [was] suitable anywhere.”⁵

In ‘Monopoly’, Morris aimed to popularise the labour theory of value as explaining the root cause of exploitation in capitalist society. The rulers understand this, he argued in a letter of 1887, and they will use every means possible to further such interests:

One of the most effective means of fighting for existence of the capitalist class is the attempt at widening the basis of monopoly, getting as many monopolists as possible; the creation of a new middle class to thrust in between the rich and the proletariat has become a necessity now for the monopolist class; the cooperative movement as it has developed is being used as a part of this attempt; this I shall have to denounce ...⁶

“I must add further,” he declared in the lecture itself,

that no programme is worthy of acceptance by the working classes that stops short of the abolition of private property in the means of production. Any other programme is misleading and dishonest.⁷

Morris was absolutely clear that it would require nothing less than a revolution to abolish capitalism and inaugurate socialism.

The pamphlet was probably amongst the most popular ever published. It was reprinted many times, with translations into Russian, Czech and Dutch. There was even an American version, printed in New York, but the only known copy is held in that centre of late nineteenth-century anarchism, Chicago.⁸

NOTES.

- ¹ N. Kelvin, editor, *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, Vol II (Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 619; *William Morris's Socialist Diary*, Editor F. Boos, (Journeyman Press, 1985), p. 33. These two works are referred to as *Letters* and *Diary* respectively. There is a query regarding the exact date of this lecture. A letter to Jenny Morris, dated in the *Diary* and *Letters* as 18th February, places the meeting on the following day. The text, however, specifically states Sunday, and since Morris's *Diary of Engagements* (B.L. Add. Mss 45409) gives Sunday as 20th, that date is taken as definitive. See N. Kelvin's Notes 1 and 10.
- ² B.L. Add. Mss 45409.f.12v Sun. 13th March 1887: "Hackney branch, Monopoly" and f.13v Sun. 20th, 1887; "Chiswick Monopoly". *Diary* p. 44.
- ³ B.L. Add. Mss. 45335.f.34. *Diary* p.44, gives "hands" for "words". This is an obvious mistake which is corrected here.
- ⁴ *Letters*, Vol. II, p. 699. The Rev. William Sharman was one of a number of clerics attracted to Socialism by William Morris.
- ⁵ *Ibid.* 6/3/1888, p. 753; 17/3/1888, p. 757. The Rev. John Glass, M.A. (1848-1918) was Minister of the Old Gray Friars Parish Church and a pioneer of Socialism in Edinburgh. He was a close friend of Morris and an active member of the Socialist League and of the Christian Socialist Society.
- ⁶ *Ibid.* 12/9/1887, p. 688.
- ⁷ 'Monopoly' in *Collected Works*, Volume XXIII, p. 253.
- ⁸ No. 11 in this bibliography.

PUBLISHED EDITIONS

- ¹ The Socialist Platform No. 7. The Socialist League [With headpiece to illustrate the themes Agitate, Educate, Organise, designed by Walter Crane.]
MONOPOLY: OR HOW LABOUR IS ROBBED by William Morris, author of *The Earthly Paradise*. Price One penny London.
Office of *The Commonweal*, 24 Great Queen street, Lincoln's Inn Fields. WC.
1890. Small 8vo 16pp without wrapper.
On the verso of title page is a cartoon signed 'H.R.' representing a workman running along a path at the end of which are the fruits of Labour guarded by a Capitalist, a Landlord, Police and a Soldier, in some with the word MONOPOLY and in others WHEN WILL HE GET THERE beneath. (This cartoon appears in Nos. 1,2,3,4,5,6,7.)
- ² The second re-issue of The Socialist Platform series in one volume included MONOPOLY.
It had a terra-cotta coloured wrapper and was priced at one shilling. Otherwise it was the same as No.1.
- ³ As No. 1 but dated 1891.

- ⁴ As above but without reference to *The Earthly Paradise* and numbered No. 1 of The Socialist Platform instead of No. 7. Socialist League Printery, 273 Hackney Road. 1891.
- ⁵ MONOPOLY: OR HOW LABOUR IS ROBBED by William Morris. with Walter Crane's cartoon 'Vive La Commune' as centre piece. The FREEDOM Library. Price one penny. Office of FREEDOM, 127 Ossulston Street, London NW. London W. Reeves, 83, Charing Cross Road, W.C. (ND).
- ⁶ As No. 4; published by W. Reeves.
- ⁷ As No. 4; printed and published by J. Turner.
- ⁸ As No. 4; no publisher's name but imprint on p. 16: Printed by T. Cantwell.
- ⁹ MONOPOLY: OR HOW LABOUR IS ROBBED by William Morris. Price One Penny. With headpiece designed by Walter Crane on the themes Labour and Justice, and inscribed THE HAMMERSMITH SOCIALIST SOCIETY. Published by The Hammersmith Socialist Society, Kelmscott House, Upper Mall, Hammersmith, London. W. 1893. Printed by Glasgow Labour Literature Society.
- ¹⁰ MONOPOLY: OR HOW LABOUR IS ROBBED by William Morris, Social Democratic Federation. c1893. 16pp.
- ¹¹ MONOPOLY, OR HOW LABOUR IS ROBBED. By William Morris, New York. Commonweal Company. 1896. 21pp Commonwealth Library No. 8.
- ¹² MONOPOLY, OR HOW LABOUR IS ROBBED. The Torch Library. London 1898.
- ¹³ *The Collected Works of William Morris* XXIII, 238-254.
- ¹⁴ Holbrook Jackson, editor, *William Morris: On Art and Socialism*. John Lehmann, 1947, pp. 194-207.
- ¹⁵ E. and R. Frow *The Politics of Hope*. Pluto Press, 1989, pp. 102-113.
- ¹⁶ Dutch Translation, Amsterdam (ND), 16pp. Monopolie, of Hoe de arbeider bestolen wordt, Amsterdam, Sterringa. z.j. 19cm, 16pp. Sterringa's 5 cent brochuren, 30.
- ¹⁷ Czech Translation. Socialism A Monopol. Zangliciny prelozil, Josef Vesely. Duch Pokroku. Cisio 23. Cena 10 hal. 24pp. Nakladem Tisheveho vyboru ceskoslovenske socialne demokraticke strany delnicke (casopis ZAF) Tiskem Deinicke Knihtiskarny v Praze.