

William MORRIS

on History

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enemies at the time had no doubt about the matter. They saw in them no mere political opponents, but "enemies of society," people who could not live in the same world with them, because the basis of their ideas of life was different—to wit, humanity, not property. This was why the fall of the Commune was celebrated by such hecatombs sacrificed to the bourgeois god, Mammon; by such a riot of blood and cruelty on the part of the conquerors as quite literally has no parallel in modern times. And it is by that same token that we honour them as the foundation-stone of the new world that is to be.

REVOLUTIONARY CALENDAR: WAT TYLER

1888

Wat Tyler.—Wat Tyler, *i.e.*, Walter, the tiler or thatcher, was an artisan of Dartford, in Kent, and became a leader in the great peasant rebellion which took place in England in the early years of Richard II (1381), and which was much more dangerous to the tyranny of the day than is usually supposed; it spread from the north of East Anglia, all through Essex and Kent, and along the south coast to Exeter. The immediate occasion of Wat Tyler's own rebellion as related by the chroniclers, was his resistance to a bailiff, who, calling for the poll-tax then being levied by the very unpopular Government, treated his young daughter brutally, and was slain by Wat with his lath-rendering axe. The rebellion, however, in which the valiant tiler was a leader, had much deeper roots than resistance to a mere tax. It was a protest against the reaction of the landlords against the inevitable movement which was abolishing serfdom; the serfs were gradually turning into tenants, and much unfree *land* was being held by free *men*; and these the landlords were attempting to force into serfdom on the ground that their lands were the lands of serfs, and that therefore they must be serfs. Wat Tyler and the Kentish bands gathered at Blackheath on June 11, 1381, and on the next day marched thence into London, where the feeling of the people was with them and where they met with no resistance. The Court was

terrified by a visit they paid to the Tower, and the King prepared to leave London; on his way occurred the celebrated scene in Smithfield, where Wat Tyler was basely assassinated while pleading the People's Cause under safe conduct. The King promised the enraged people whatever they demanded, and thus broke up their gathering, and as a matter of course kept his promise afterwards by wholesale murders amongst his helpless and scattered people. Nevertheless, though the rebellion was put down it had slain the reaction it was aimed at before it died itself, and the extinction of serfdom in England went on faster and faster.

SOCIALISM FROM THE ROOT UP

1886