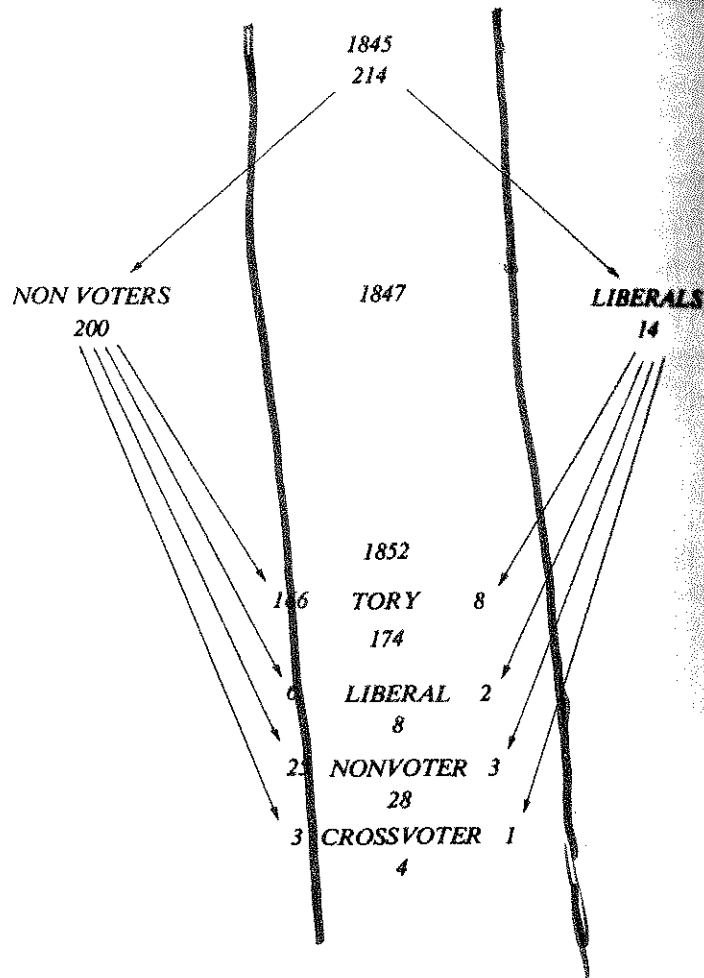


FIGURE 1



The Politics of William Morris's *News from Nowhere*

Trevor Lloyd

When one of the characters in William Morris's utopian romance *News from Nowhere* says "We are very well off as to politics—because we have none" he was talking about the manipulation and intrigue that everyone hopes will be banished from utopia.¹ Morris had to carry on his own political work amidst the manoeuvring he hoped would be unnecessary in the future. *News from Nowhere* is about politics in the sense in which the word is used in the title of Aristotle's *Politics*; and it teaches the rather Aristotelian message "Men come together in communities to live, they remain in communities to live in fellowship."² But the book had its local and immediate political context: most directly, in 1890 Morris gave up the editorship of the Socialist League magazine *Commonweal*, which was publishing the story in installments, when twenty out of the thirty-nine installments had appeared.³ While his retirement was not entirely voluntary there is no reason to think that the remaining installments were altered by the new editors. When Morris published the story as a book the following year he added a certain amount of new material which indicates a somewhat different point of view.

What he published in 1890 (the *Commonweal* version) was considerably closer to the anarchist view of revolution than what is now accepted as *News from Nowhere*, and what he added for the 1891 version (the book) shows a distinct shift towards an attitude more favourable to the State Socialists, or Fabians, that anything he wrote in *Commonweal*. The fact that there is a substantial difference between what he first published and what is in the book is not

¹William Morris, *News from Nowhere* (London, 1970), p. 72. This is probably the most easily accessible edition. It is based on the book published in 1891, and does not show the changes from the original story.

²Morris retired on 25 May 1890. E.P. Thompson, *William Morris* (London, 1977), p. 566. This book is the eagerly awaited new edition of Thompson's monumental 1955 life of Morris, and is free from some of the signs of the pressures of the Cold War visible in the first version.

mentioned by E.P. Thompson, and is positively denied by Paul Meier who asks us to believe that it appeared "en feuilletons dans *Commonweal* et que l'écrivain n'y a jamais apporté la moindre retouche."¹

The politics of the Socialist League were so small-scale and so extreme that they would hardly be worth a glance if Morris had not adorned the League with his genius. The shift from the 1890 to the 1891 version deserves attention for what it reveals about Morris and for what it may show about other people who may have been moving in the same direction at the same time; it is safe to say that developments within the League are interesting only for what they show about Morris.

He had first become active in politics in the agitation over the eastern question in the 1870s. He had been Treasurer of the anti-Turkish (and pro-Gladstonian) Eastern Question Association, and he went on to become Treasurer of the National Liberal League, a London-based organisation on the left of the Liberal party. In the 1880s he became still more active and moved further left; in 1883 he became Treasurer of the Democratic Federation which had been launched in 1881 with a programme including Disestablishment, Home Rule and Land Nationalisation that placed it on the extreme left of the Liberal party; and he remained Treasurer in 1884 when it was renamed the Social Democratic Federation and added specifically socialist items to its former programme which clearly took it out of the Liberal party.⁴

The leader and inspirer of the S.D.F., H.M. Hyndman, was a fervent Marxist, but in some political matters he was rather conventional: he reckoned that if the S.D.F. was to be a political party, then it should run candidates for parliament just like all the other parties. Morris found electoral manoeuvring distasteful, and he did not think socialism was anything like firmly enough established in Britain to stand the strain of the compromises that are often necessary in elections; he took a leading part in the secession from the S.D.F. which led to the creation of the Socialist League early in 1885.⁵ Small though

¹Thompson, p. 502, about Morris's views on the date of the revolution, is a clear sign that Thompson had not noticed that Morris changed his mind on various points between 1890 and 1891. Paul Meier, *La pensée utopique de William Morris* (Paris, 1972), p. 433. M.R. Liberman's doctoral thesis, *William Morris's "News from Nowhere": A Critical and Annotated Edition*, Nebraska, 1971, gives the *Commonweal* text (from which the Boston 1890 edition was pirated), the 1891 text with its substantial additions, and the Kelmscott 1892 edition in which very few additional changes were made. Liberman notes the changes but writes (p.67) as though they were hostile to the State Socialists.

⁴Thompson, pp. 211, 261, 296-7, 344-5.

⁵Thompson, p. 357-61.

it was (its membership probably never rose above 1,000), the League was an unstable alliance of groups which did not have much more in common than their belief that electoral politics and Hyndman would lead to trouble, and they were confirmed in this view by the S.D.F.'s acceptance of Conservative funds to run candidates in seats where they might draw off left-wing Liberal votes in the general election of 1885. But anti-Hyndmanism was about the only thing that could unite the Marx family group led by Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling with Engles' prestige behind them, the London anarchists, Morris's own friends and admirers, and the socialists who felt uneasy about Hyndman, of whom Belfort Bax could be taken as the leading example.⁶

The Marx group were naturally linked to the German S.P.D. and it would have been difficult for them to give up electoral politics entirely, so after the split from Hyndman they became more and more ready to consider running candidates. Morris and the anarchists opposed this and were able to prevail, partly because Aveling weakened his own position and that of the Marx group by his persistent inability to explain his accounts creditably. By 1888 some of the members Morris most valued (notably Belfort Bax with whom he had written a series of articles on Socialism in *Commonweal*)⁷ had left the League because they wanted to be able to contest elections, and in London the League had been reduced to a group of anarchists and a smaller group of supporters of Morris. Although the League enrolled several of the first British socialists outside London, like Maguire in Leeds and Glasier in Glasgow, British socialism in the 1880s was still based in London and it was in London that Morris had to fight to survive. It cannot be said that Morris was not a Marxist simply because he parted company with the Marx group on this question nor does it follow that he was an anarchist because he went with the anarchists and provided the extra votes for the anti-electoral majority; but the attitude he took on this question of strategy did limit his freedom of action while he remained politically active.

Until the departure of Bax and his associates Morris had held a central position between them and the anarchists: he was closer to the

⁶Thompson, especially p. 415; Meier p. 331-4 extends our knowledge of Engels's involvement; Yvonne Kapp, *Eleanor Marx: The Crowded Years* (London, 1976), pp. 56-68 and 91-2.

⁷The articles appeared under the heading "Socialism from the Root up" between 15 May 1886 and 6 August 1887; Morris and Bax never quite lost touch with each other and later they published the articles with a few changes as *Socialism. Its Growth and Outcome* (London, 1893).

⁸Thompson, pp. 504-5 and 507-9.

anarchists than was anyone else in British politics, but his agreement with them can be over-stated. In 1889 he conducted an argument with them in *Commonweal*; he did not go into the question of the "propaganda of the deed" (the phrase used by anarchists to refer to the acts of individual terrorism which earned them their not entirely undeserved reputation as a group of bomb-throwing guerrillas) but he made it clear that he thought that the will of the majority would have to prevail even in the most free and perfect of societies, and after a number of critical comments by anarchists he replied that his opponents simply could not have thought what they meant when they said that under socialism there would be no need for a final authority in society to bind a dissentient minority. Morris was not an anarchist even in the theoretical sense of believing that after the revolution the withering away of the state would mean that no coercive force was left in existence: he could quite see that much of the coercive force in society was employed to protect property rights and that this would not be needed under socialism, but he thought that something more would still be needed.⁹

Morris took up his argument with the anarchists again in *News from Nowhere*. There were of course things in the story that would conciliate the anarchists; the idea of the Houses of Parliament being turned into a storage place for manure would reassure them as well as giving Morris a chance to express his low opinion of politicians.¹⁰ But Chapter 14, "How Things are Managed," returned to the argument with the anarchists in the previous year. The opinion of the anarchists which he opposed most directly was that, because all coercive force was wrong, the majority had no right to impose its will on the minority and no changes should be made unless they were accepted unanimously. While a right-wing anarchist could use this argument in a Herbert Spencer-like way to block all change, the anarchists with whom Morris worked were sure that capitalism would soon be overthrown by a spontaneous revolution that would destroy private property and create a community in which people would not be divided along lines of self-interest.¹¹ Morris argued that in the most property-free community the will of the majority must prevail in practical decisions like bridge-building or the time of harvesting and, even within a

⁹*Commonweal* 18 May and 17 August 1889 give Morris's point of view; 22 June and 6 July provide examples of the anarchist point of view.

¹⁰*News from Nowhere*, p. 26.

¹¹The opening chapters of Kropotkin, *La Conquête du Pain* (Paris, 1892; English translation, London, 1906) take for granted this type of spontaneous property-eliminating revolution.

libertarian framework, this argument weighed against the anarchists.¹² Morris seems to have felt that in this chapter he had put his argument satisfactorily; while he later made changes elsewhere that were unfavourable to the anarchist approach, he added nothing here (and almost all the 1891 changes to the story take the form of additions; very little was removed).¹³ But while this chapter was anti-anarchist in the context of the arguments within the Socialist League, the need for the will of the majority to prevail was put in very gentle and moderate terms; Morris understood why the anarchists wanted to eliminate the power of the state, and in any case he probably reckoned that he still had to work with them.

In the event, it was about four weeks after chapter 14 appeared in *Commonweal* that he was squeezed out of the editorship. The chapter may have made the anarchists more willing to take this step, but there was a more immediate conflict involved: Morris wanted to reduce the loss on the magazine (amounting to a few hundred pounds a year, which he met out of his own pocket) by publishing every month instead of every week. The anarchist majority resisted this and said that what was needed was more enthusiasm. Morris handed over the editorship, but continued to contribute money and articles.¹⁴ It seems clear, if only from the relative clumsiness of the transitions where some of the 1891 additions were put in, that they were written later and that there is no question of an original text held back by Morris to spare the feelings of the anarchists (and there were additions made in the book to installments published while Morris was still editor).

Morris found the anarchists' policies more unacceptable than he had expected; their advocacy of "propaganda of the dead" alarmed and disgusted him, and by 19 July he was warning Nicoll, one of the new editors, that the magazine was going too far.¹⁵ Very shortly after the last installment of *News from Nowhere* came out he withdrew from the League altogether, saying in the article announcing his withdrawal that he disagreed both with electoral politics (called "palliation" in the article, because this was the word the League had always used to describe Hyndman's approach) and also with "partial, necessarily feeble, inconsequent revolt, or riot rather . . . which summed

¹²*News from Nowhere*, p. 74-6.

¹³The only deletion of interest is that *Commonweal*, 25 January 1890, refers to the Hammersmith branch of the Socialist League which in *News from Nowhere*, p. 12, is simply the Hammersmith Socialists—that is, the small group Morris set up after leaving the League. Apart from this, he allowed what he had written to stand.

¹⁴Thompson, p. 566.

¹⁵Phillip Henderson ed., *Letters of William Morris* (London, 1950), p. 324-5.

up concisely enough his opposition to the "propaganda of the deed."¹⁶

Despite all this, Prince Kropotkin, the great anarchist leader then in exile in London, wrote in his obituary of Morris that *News from Nowhere* "was the most thoroughly and deeply anarchist conception of future society that had ever been written."¹⁷ In some ways this was fair enough: the first and the last sections of the book made no reference to the institutions of government, and what appeared in *Commonweal* did not lay much stress on them except in chapter 14. The first section of Morris's dream is a morning spent with an ordinary member of the utopian community, and the last section is an idyllic though not non-political four days spent rowing up the Thames; these two sections are meant to show how pleasant life could be under socialism rather than to clarify principles.¹⁸ But the middle section, a six-hour discussion about the way the new society works and how it emerged from the 19th-century capitalism, is the main exposition of political ideas in the story—writers of utopias almost always include some such explanation of their ideas (in Orwell's *1984*, for example, Bernstein's book and what O'Brien says to Winston Smith while torturing him are really expositions of Orwell's views), and they probably think that these explanatory sections are the important parts of their books. It tends to be the little details of life that stick in the minds of the readers: the narrator going into a shop to buy a pipe and not having to pay for it, or the boat trip up the Thames, are the things in *News from Nowhere* that are remembered and the long central discussion grips the imagination less completely. Some readers emerge almost without noticing that Morris expected socialism to be established by bloodshed and civil war; Kropotkin may have overstated Morris's sympathy for anarchism out of a similar failure to pay full attention to the middle section of the book.¹⁹ And even in that section, chapter 11, "Concerning Government," contains such phrases as "In your sense of the word we have no government," which might look anarchist enough to gratify Kropotkin. On the other hand the argument goes on immediately afterwards to say that nobody has any need for "an elaborate system of government, with its army, navy and police, to force him to give way to the will of the majority of his equals," and he thus reasserted the point of theory at

¹⁶William Morris, "Where are we now?" *Commonweal*, 15 November 1890.

¹⁷P. Kropotkin, "William Morris," *Freedom*, November 1896.

¹⁸The three sections cover pp. 1-45, 45-115 and 115-82 of *News from Nowhere*.

¹⁹E.g. J. Hulse, *Revolutionists in London* (Oxford, 1970), p. 89.

issue: the majority would prevail.²⁰ Morris was anxious to stress that he believed in democracy, and he was not eager to quarrel with the anarchists, and on the whole he managed these two points very well both in the long discussion of principles and in the rest of the story.

Parts of the long discussion between the narrator and the older Hammond have been overtaken by developments in this century. Chapter 9, "Concerning Love," would in the 1890s be considered as an argument for promiscuity; at the present day it might be seen simply as a rather successful prediction of the way that the institution of marriage has changed since then, and probably Morris would have been as pleasantly surprised to find that these changes were possible under capitalism as he would have been sorry to find that capitalism was still in existence. Part of chapter 15 "The Incentive to Labour," argued that overproduction was driving European powers into Africa to find new markets for their products. When Bax presented this version of the theory of capitalist imperialism in *Commonweal* in July 1888 nobody had got much further in explaining the European expansion in Africa which was then under way than calling the British occupation of Egypt a "bondholders' war." This may or may not have been accurate, but it did not explain why expansion went on far beyond Egypt; Bax's explanation was a considerable improvement on the theories then current, though it may well have been superseded by now. Morris was very interested in it, expressed approval of it in *Commonweal*, and adopted it for *News from Nowhere*.²¹

Morris's views on love and on empire lay a little way from the central theme of his argument. Chapter 17, "How the Change Came," which was just beginning to come out when he left the editorship, was much the longest chapter in the *Commonweal* version and, as it was expanded in 1891, it ran to about one-eighth of the book. The changes were more substantial than those made elsewhere, and were fairly directly related to current political arguments. The *Commonweal* version of the chapter moved without pause from a denunciation of what Morris called "State Socialists" into the story of a revolution breaking out spontaneously in the way predicted by the anarchists—"People did not need to be told that the general strike had begun."²² In a sense this account blamed the State Socialists for the revolution; they had tried to produce palliatives when nothing less than peaceful and radical change could avert violent and radical

²⁰*News from Nowhere*, p. 63-4.

²¹*Commonweal* 28 July and 11 August 1888; *News from Nowhere*, p. 80-1.

²²*News from Nowhere*, p. 103.

change. What is being attacked here is fairly certainly the attitude of the Fabian Society, whose *Fabian Essays in Socialism* had appeared in 1889. Morris's very hostile review of the book appeared in *Commonweal* in the same week as the third installment of *News from Nowhere*. To a greater or lesser extent he disapproved of all the essays, but his harshest comments were aimed at Sidney Webb: "He seems to enjoy all the humiliations of opportunism, to revel in it, so to say." This is rather like the comment in *News from Nowhere* that "the men who were then called Socialists, although they knew that the only reasonable condition of society was that of pure Communism, yet shrank from what seemed to them the barren task of preaching the realisation of a happy dream."²³

So much attention was being paid at the time to Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* that it has been suggested Morris was attacking it rather than *Fabian Essays in Socialism*.²⁴ But although he regarded Bellamy's version of the socialist state as rather vulgar, and perhaps thought it likely to lead to North America becoming the "stinking dustheap" it had become by the period described in *News from Nowhere*, he had already accepted the fact that people's immediate response to the abolition of private property might be to seek the luxurious standard of living he once described as a "Bonanza farm."²⁵ Even if he thought *Looking Backward* read a little like a Fabian's utopia (he called it a "cockney utopia") he declared that "Bellamy has faced the problem of economic reconstruction with courage." Courage and love of equality made up for a good deal in Morris' eyes; it seems unlikely that he would have included Bellamy in the older Hammond's comment that the State Socialists "had no faith" in the longing for freedom and equality. His review of *Looking Backward* was by no means entirely unfavourable, and in his review of *Fabian Essays* he said directly enough that he preferred Bellamy to Sidney Webb.²⁶

In *Commonweal* the story moved from denouncing the State Socialists and their desire for "practical" measures, which Morris

²³*Commonweal*, 25 January 1890; *News from Nowhere*, p. 89. "State Socialist" had from Morris something of the derogatory undertones that sometimes are attached to the word "reformist" at the present day.

²⁴S. Bowman, *Edward Bellamy Abroad* (New York, 1962), p. 86-8; Meier, pp. 124 and 128; on p. 683 Meier refers to "Le gradualisme fabien de l'utopiste yankee," but leaves *Fabian Essays in Socialism* virtually unnoticed; Thompson, p. 542.

²⁵*News from Nowhere*, p. 84; *Commonweal*, 18 May 1889.

²⁶*Commonweal* 25 June 1889 and 25 February 1890; *News from Nowhere*, p. 89.

thought likely to divide the working class and encourage an aristocracy of labour, to an account of the riots which start the revolution that is clearly based on his memories of Bloody Sunday, 13 November 1887. In this version the struggle starts without any organisation to speak of, but in the book Morris inserted several pages about trade unions and State Socialists and their rôle in laying the foundations for the revolution, and in the story of the revolution itself he added a reference to union organisation.²⁷ This was a considerable change; the comment "It is not unlikely that Morris had read some of the chapters that later went into Kropotkin's *The Conquest of Bread* shortly before he wrote these chapters [about the revolution]"²⁸ may be no more than a conjecture but is in accordance with what appeared in *Commonweal*. In the book the general strike and the revolution depend on the organisation of the Federation of Combined Workers which is taken to have been building its strength over the preceding sixty years, and it is the Federation rather than a spontaneous convention which creates the Committee of Public Safety which carries out the revolution. The revolution described in *Commonweal* was of the spontaneous sort that Kropotkin expected, though even here it is possible to overstate the similarity between the two authors; Kropotkin took it for granted that there would be a revolution and was really concerned with the problems of organisation on an effective anarchist basis immediately after it, a point that Morris passed over without worrying about it very much. Morris's revised account, with its heavy emphasis on trade unions, has very little in common with the original *Conquest of Bread*, which was so concerned with voluntary organisation and so little involved with the working class that it devoted more attention to the way the Dutch barge owners arranged their problems on a basis of amicable agreement than to trade unions as a model for anarchist societies. Kropotkin's views had developed by the time an English version was published in 1906 and he wrote a strongly pro-trade union introduction to it, but this was not really in keeping with the text.

On the continent of Europe anarchism directed by trade unions is distinct enough from anarchism standing alone to be called anarcho-syndicalism; the word is so far from English usage, and Morris was so very English, that it would seem out of place even if it could accurately be applied to him. In any case, even in 1891 Morris saw

²⁷From p. 91, line 19 and p. 94, line 40, is inserted; and on p. 95 the words "from the Confederation of the Combined Workmen" is inserted.

²⁸Hulse, p. 102.

unions only as precursors of the revolution itself,²⁹ while a thoroughgoing anarcho-syndicalist would expect unions to be important after the revolution as well. Pataud and Pouget, two leaders of the *Confédération Générale de Travail*, published an anarcho-syndicalist utopia, *Comment nous ferons la Révolution*, in 1909 and, while it resembles the 1891 version of *News from Nowhere* in the emphasis it lays on unions as organisers of the revolutionary struggle, it is closer to *La Conquête du Pain* on other matters; its concentration upon the crisis expected immediately after the overthrow of the old order, its emphasis on boycotting or ostracism and even the details of rehousing all show that Kropotkin had had a considerable though not necessarily direct influence. The enthusiasm of the French writers for Jules Verne-like devices for defeating the last remnants of resistance and for repelling British and German invasions directed against the revolution would not have got much response from Morris or Kropotkin, but it was quite understandable that, when an English version of *How we shall bring about the Revolution* appeared in 1913, Kropotkin wrote a preface for it.³⁰

The spontaneous revolution expected by the anarchists could not seem a very probable way for change to happen; and it was also rather frustrating because it did not show what committed supporters of the revolution could do to help bring it about. Three other roads to socialism could be considered: anarcho-syndicalism; Leninism, or the creation of a political party to organise a revolution (likely to be called Blanquism at that time); and Fabianism, or the achievement of radical reform through the existing political system. Even though Fabianism might not be very exhilarating, it had the great attraction that it was proposing a comprehensible method for bringing about change. *Fabian Essays in Socialism* must have owed some of its success to this.³¹ It was not surprising that Morris with his views about electoral politics found this approach unappealing, but it was an approach that had to be taken seriously.

Faced with these choices it was natural for Morris to fall back on the idea of a union-based revolution when he had given up the idea

²⁹There is one more reference to the Combined Workmen, *News from Nowhere*, p. 104, but Morris seems to have thought that once the unions had set up a Committee of Public Safety, it would conduct the revolution.

³⁰E. Pataud and E. Pouget, *How we shall bring about the Revolution* (London, 1913).

³¹Edward R. Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society* (London, 1963), p. 88-90, gives details of the publishing success of *Fabian Essays in Socialism*, and attributes its success to the fact that it offered a coherent policy.

of a spontaneous revolution, which must have seemed less and less likely to be successful as he thought about the anarchists with whom he had just parted company. Morris was resigned to the fact that if change depended on the unions it would take a certain amount of time before anything happened. Providing a chronology for a utopia always runs the risk of looking like an attempt to catch moonbeams, but *News from Nowhere* does contain a system of dating—even if the system is not consistent in either version—and the changes in the dates show how Morris's hopes for revolution were changing. The book dates the revolution about forty years later than the *Commonweal* version: in 1890 Morris wrote of a revolution breaking out after twenty years in which socialist tendencies had appeared and been tolerated, which meant that he would see it if he lived to the age of 70 or so (It was just conceivable, granted that people would live longer under socialism, that Morris might have survived to play the part of the older Hammond, who of course in one sense is Morris).³² But in 1891 he set the revolution firmly and precisely in 1952, presumably resigned to the fact that he would not see it.³³ While this is straight-forward enough, dating the period at which the events in *News from Nowhere* themselves take place is a little harder. Counting from 1952, and reckoning that people have been living under socialism for 150 years, Meier sets it in the 22nd century. Fair enough, but in chapter 2 of the book the narrator sees a bridge built fifty or sixty years after the revolution—1971 in *Commonweal* and 2003 in the book—which is a little weathered but is described as “not very old,” which is hard to reconcile with the fact that it must have been a hundred years old (and built in the period described rather contemptuously by Henry Morsom) if Meier is right.³⁴ These figures do not fit together, and presumably Morris found this exercise in chronology much less interesting than the question whether he could venture to predict a revolution in his own lifetime. Once he had decided that he could not, he might have chosen the date 1952 for it in the book simply to avoid changing the date for the great clearing

³²The nearest to a date for the revolution in the *Commonweal* version is in the 24 May installment, where the counter-revolutionaries complain that socialist tendencies had been tolerated for twenty years. Liberman, p. 383, infers from this that it was set in 1910, but perhaps Morris was just saying “another dozen years of work for the revolution.”

³³Morris specified 1952, *News from Nowhere*, pp. 35 and 93; the phrase about “tolerated for twenty years” was changed to “sixty” (p. 97).

³⁴*Commonweal*, 18 January 1890; *News from Nowhere*, pp. 6, 67 and 155; Meier, p. 432.

of the houses, which is set in 1955 in both versions.³⁵

Setting the revolution in 1910 was not just a sign of optimism. It had also allowed him to link Fabian palliatives fairly directly to the breakdown and revolution. But in 1891 he was becoming rather less hostile to the State Socialists and allowing them some role in a revolution conducted under trade union leadership. In *Commonweal* revolution was a response to ill-treatment and economic collapse; in the book the cause was rather less clear-cut, partly because the join between the end of the long inserted passage and the existing text was a little contrived, but the beginning of the struggle undoubtedly owed a lot to the co-operation of trade unionists and State Socialists. Even in 1890 Morris had seen that the upper classes would not be able to be as high-handed as in the past, and in 1891 he added to this the comment "So far the State Socialists were justified by the result."³⁶ He had clearly been thinking what this would imply, and later on in the book he speaks of the trade unionists and socialists forcing minimum wage and maximum price legislation out of the capitalist government. Meier thinks such laws so drastic that he describes them as the first steps taken by the revolutionaries, but this is not the case: the laws of maximum and minimum are seen as part of the pressure that the reforming alliance applies to the upper classes in the period in which the "partial practice of State Socialism had at first distorted and then paralysed the marvellous system of commerce," and when the reformers go on to ask for the natural resources of the country and its machinery to be placed in the hands of the trade unions the upper classes "prepare for a firm stand against the brutal and ferocious communism of the day, as they phrased it."³⁷ There is still a role for revolution in Morris's picture of the world, but it is much more of a counter-revolution than it had been in *Commonweal*—perhaps it should be taken as a warning that Fabianism is not bound to lead to reforms peacefully, but it is nevertheless a revolution started by the upper class in response to organized socialist pressure.³⁸

³⁵*Commonweal*, 25 January 1890; *News from Nowhere*, p. 13.

³⁶*News from Nowhere*, p. 91.

³⁷Meier, p. 426; *News from Nowhere*, p. 93-4.

³⁸Morris may conceivably not always have been so sure of the inevitability of a violent break in development. Meier writes as though Morris, when he used the term "State Socialism," had difficulty deciding whether this was a matter of a welfare state system or the first stage of socialism, p. 438-9. Meier is of course sure that these two stages of development would not blend peacefully into one another; was Morris so sure?

In the account of the revolution Morris was working over in his mind the political situation of 1885-7. There had then been a possibility of revolution, or at least some socialists and some of the propertied class thought that there had been. The revolution in *News from Nowhere* starts after a meeting in Trafalgar Square rather like those of the mid-1880s, and Morris's comments about the political parties in his story reflect his feelings about the parties in the 1880s.³⁹ Morris had no second thoughts about his hostility to the Conservatives: he saw them as imperialists who could not be expected to sympathise with the working class. The best he could say for them, or at least for gentlemen, was that when civil war came the gentlemen and the workmen between them destroyed commercialism.⁴⁰ But before that happened the Conservatives had employed a brutal military commander just back from slaughtering natives in Africa (i.e. Sir Charles Warren) to drive the workers out of Trafalgar Square. Morris's attitude to the Liberals was more complicated: in the story the older Hammond takes it for granted that the Liberals ought to have been on the side of the working class and speaks of a Liberal government which, after starting the process of repression, allowed itself to be defeated "clearly by collusion."⁴¹ This probably expressed Morris's view of the Liberal split of 1886. After the 1885 election (the one in which the S.D.F. had accepted Conservative funds), Gladstone had taken up Home Rule as party policy, and his government split and fell on the issue.⁴² At first this made relatively little difference to the demonstrations by the unemployed that the socialists had been organising; the mass meetings held in winter when unemployment was high went on in the winter of 1886-7 under the Conservatives as much as in 1885-6 under the Liberals, and then were brought to an abrupt stop by the Conservatives in November 1887.

In his *Commonweal* notes at the time, and in the *Commonweal* version of *News from Nowhere*, Morris wrote as though the Liberals, despite their support for Home Rule, were no better than the Conservatives. In the sections inserted in 1891 he termed the Liberals "the more democratically inclined part of the ruling class," and said that Gladstone had been condemned by the ruling class for his

³⁹*News from Nowhere*, p. 101-3.

⁴⁰*News from Nowhere*, p. 112.

⁴¹*News from Nowhere*, p. 102.

⁴²Naturally Morris was pro-Home Rule, *Commonweal*, October 1885, but he was almost as interested in the way "moderates" were coming together in the Unionist party to impose law and order, *Commonweal*, 22 May, 26 June and 3 July 1886.

concessions to the lower class.⁴³ The change indicates one difficulty faced by people attracted to socialism when they thought about the Liberal party. For Hyndman and his closest associates there was no problem; they had some connections with the Conservatives and felt no sympathy for the Liberals. But most socialists started as Liberals,⁴⁴ and for the most moderate of them there was a serious problem: should they encourage the creation of a separate party or try to encourage socialist views within the Liberal party? The mixed response to the problem could be seen in the Fabian Society: seven members of the Society were elected to Parliament in 1906, four as Labour and three as Liberals, though there is no reason to doubt that all of them accepted the Fabian basis: "The Fabian Society consists of socialists."⁴⁵

The description of the Liberal government suggests that Morris thought any party of reform was liable to be defeated in Parliament by the defection of its moderate wing, and he was probably glad that his aversion to parliamentary politics saved him from having to commit himself on the question of an election-oriented Labour party; he once wrote "If ever there should be a Socialist party, at least let there be a Socialist propaganda of principle existing beside it and not tied to it."⁴⁶ There is no sign that he changed his basic view on this topic, though the 1891 modifications to *News from Nowhere* show he was distinctly more willing to think of trade unionists as allies, willing to soften his attitude to reformers slightly and resigned to the thought that revolution would not come in his lifetime. He brought himself to work with Hyndman, wrote articles for the S.D.F. magazine *Justice*, and drafted a joint statement of socialist principles with Shaw and Hyndman which was intended to reconcile the various socialist groups. His lack of sympathy with the anarchists had become more pronounced as he no longer accepted their idea of a spontaneous revolution, though he still expressed this disagreement in an amicable manner. By 1891 Morris was too old, too worn by the struggle, and too interested in prose romances and in printing to take anything like as active a part in politics as he had done from 1885 to 1890; but his readiness to think trade unionists and state socialists could produce measures that built up the pressure on capitalism (and

perhaps even his willingness to say that the Liberals were not as bad as the Conservatives) were alterations in the story, and in his point of view, ones which made it a bit easier for socialists to take the steps that led to the creation of the Labour party. Even the 1891 version of *News from Nowhere* is revolutionary in attitude, but compared with the original 1890 version it points to the road that led to the socialist alliance with the trade unions for parliamentary action. Morris did not walk that road, but the development of his views must have encouraged the socialists who admired him to follow it in the 1890s.

⁴³*News from Nowhere*, pp. 94.

⁴⁴C.A. Cline, *Recruits to Labour* (New York, 1964) gives biographical details of over sixty people of some importance in the Labour party who had previously been Liberals, but this is primarily concerned with the 1914 period.

⁴⁵Pease, p. 153.

⁴⁶*Commonweal*, 20 April 1889.