William Morris and incomplete Communism: a critique of Paul Meier's thesis

by Adam Buick

There is one very dubious theme running all the way through Paul Meier's monumental work *La Pensée Utopique de William Morris*. According to Meier, Morris held the view that before the stage of 'pure Communism' (as described in *News from Nowhere*) could be reached society would inevitably have to pass first through a prolonged and difficult transition period with features basically similar to what has existed in Russia since 1917.

Meier states his theme quite early on in the following passage:

Morris, à la suite de Marx, envisage deux étapes successives dans la construction de la société future. La première; celle du socialisme, qui suivra la prise du pouvoir par la classe ouvrière, sera une période d'édification lente et penible au cours de laquelle l'Etat prolétarian liquidera la vieille société de classes, prendra possession de tous les moyens de production et d'échange et mettra sur pied une économie efficace et démocratique. Cet Etat, par la force des choses, sera autoritaire et devra disposer de moyens de coercition. Mais ce n'est là qu'une transition. Lorsque la démocratie sera assurée, lorsque l'économie nouvelle connaîtra l'abondance, lorsque bien des contradictions auront été surmontées, une nouvelle ère s'ouvrira, celle du communisme, dont le trait politique fondamental sera le dépérissement de l'Etat. Ce premier stade, caractérisé par le socialisme d'État, Morris l'envisage sans plaisir et même avec appréhension, mais il le

(NB — The footnotes for this article are grouped at the end of it.)

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Some of what Meier says here is true, but some is not. It is true that Morris was a Marxist and, like Marx, insisted that the working class would have to capture political power in order to establish a classless society based on the common ownership and democratic control by all the people of the means of production. It is true also that Morris did not think that it would be possible to establish immediately 'pure Communism', where every member of society would have free access to consumer goods and services on the principle 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs'. And it is true that he used the term 'socialism' to refer to the early stages of this classless society, when there would still have to be some restrictions on individual consumption, a stage he also described as 'incomplete Communism'.

But it is not true that he thought that this first stage would be long and penible as Meier asserts; nor that he thought that a coercive and repressive State machine would continue to exist during it; nor did he call it 'State socialism'.

But since Morris was a Marxist—about which there can be no doubt whatsoever following the publication in English of E. P. Thompson's *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* in 1955 and now the publication in French of this work of Meier's—it is well to begin at the beginning, with Marx's own views. To back up his thesis, Meier relies heavily on some marginal notes Marx wrote in 1875 criticising the programme adopted that year by a conference of German Social Democrats at Gotha. Meier quotes extensively from these notes in a footnote which runs over three pages. We too would recommend a reading of this short pamphlet of Marx's, first published in 1891 under the title *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, since a picture rather different from that Meier would have his readers see will emerge.

In his notes Marx speaks of the 'first' and 'higher' phases of
'communist society'. In other words, he speaks of successive phases of the same society, phases distinguished basically by the way in which wealth is allocated for individual consumption. In the first phase, which would obviously have been necessary in 1875 because the means of production were not then developed enough, consumption would have to be restricted in the sense that, though the mass of the people would get much more than under capitalism, full free access to consumer goods and services according to individual need could not be implemented. This being so, some method of allocating consumer goods would have to be devised and Marx suggested (and it was only a suggestion, as his other writings make clear¹) as a possible method 'labour-time vouchers'. Under this system the individual producer

receives a certificate from society that he has furnished such and such an amount of labour (after deducting his labour for the common funds), and with this certificate he draws from the social stock of means of consumption as much as costs the same amount of labour.²

In the higher phase, once the means of production had been developed further, these restrictions on individual consumption could be removed and communist society could implement the principle 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs': a person's contribution to society in the form of hours of work would not be measured; goods would not be priced; people would simply take, free and without payment of any kind, whatever they felt they needed from the common stock of goods set aside for individual consumption (as people do, of course, in Morris' News from Nowhere).

It is important to emphasise that, for Marx, in both stages the basis of society would be the same: the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production; the planned production of wealth solely to satisfy human needs; the abolition of classes and therefore of the need for a coercive State machine; the administration of things in place of coercive government over people. In other words, both stages would be stages of the same classless, Stateless, moneyless³ society. Meier, as has been seen, would have his readers believe that
Marx thought that the State, as the public power of coercion, would continue to exist during the first phase of classless communist society. There is nothing in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* to suggest such an interpretation. In one passage Marx asks,

> What transformation will the state undergo in communist society? In other words, what social functions will remain in existence that are analogous to present state functions?4

A reasonable question since the present-day State is not purely an instrument of coercion but is also to some extent an instrument of social administration. Obviously, if the State’s coercive features were lopped off, the function of social administration would remain. That this was what Marx had in mind should be clear from his general analysis elsewhere of the coercive State as the product of class society, where it functions as an instrument of class rule and as a means of containing class struggles.5 It follows from this that, once classes are abolished, as they would be *even in the first phase* of communist society, then there is no longer any need for a public power of coercion; accordingly it is lopped off, dismantled or, to use a stronger phrase Marx himself often used, it is smashed.

Meier rejects this of course. With an eye on Russian experience, he has to insist that there would be a State in the first stage and that ‘cet Etat . . . sera autoritaire et devra disposer de moyens de coercition’. There is absolutely no justification for saying that this was the view either of Marx or Engels nor, as will be seen, of Morris who agreed with them on this point.

Marx, however, did believe that there would be a period during which the state would continue to exist between capitalism and the first stage of communism (rather than between capitalism and the higher stage of communism, as Meier would have us believe), when in fact it would be an instrument in the hands of the socialist working class precisely to carry out the social revolution that would transform capitalism into classless communism:

> Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to
this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the *revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat* (Marx's emphasis). 6

But once the socialist working class had used the State to dispossess the capitalist and landowning classes and to make the means of production instead the common property of society as a whole, under the democratic control of all the people, then class society would have been abolished and therefore there would no longer be any need for a repressive State. As Engels put it:

As soon as there is no longer any social class to be held in subjection; as soon as class rule, and the individual struggle for existence based upon our present anarchy in production, with the collisions and the excesses arising from these, are removed, nothing more remains to be repressed, and a special repressive force, a State, is no longer necessary. The first act by virtue of which the State really constitutes itself the representative of the whole society—the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society—this is, at the same time, its last independent act as a State. State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies out of itself; the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The State is not "abolished". *It dies out* (Engels' emphasis). 7

This paragraph from Engels has been quoted more fully than it usually is because Meier uses it as justification for employing the term *déperissement* in relation to the State (though in fact the word used in the French translation approved by Engels is *s'éteindre*), which suggests a gradual, lingering death and fits in nicely with his view that the coercive, repressive State should not disappear until the higher phase of communism—as opposed to the view of Marx and Engels that it would disappear once the first phase of classless communist society was reached, i.e., in a very much shorter period of time, in fact before socialism or communism, call it what you will, was established.

Before examining Morris' own views, it will be useful to consider Lenin's. In 1917 in his *April Theses* Lenin wrote:

From capitalism mankind can pass directly only to socialism, i.e., to
the social ownership of the means of production and the distribution of products according to the amount of work performed by each individual. Our Party looks farther ahead: socialism must inevitably evolve gradually into communism, upon the banner of which is inscribed in the motto, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." 8

This terminology—calling the first stage of classless society 'socialism' and the higher stage 'communism'—was new in Marxist circles in that Marx and Engels had themselves always employed the terms 'socialism' and 'communism' interchangeably. Before Lenin, the only Marxist to use the terms in this way was William Morris, though Lenin is unlikely to have known this (Lenin could possibly have read News from Nowhere, but then Morris does not make the distinction in this book). However, it would be unwise to make a principle out of mere words; as long as Lenin meant the same by 'socialism' as Marx meant by 'first phase of communist society' then no confusion need necessarily arise from this new terminology of his.

However, in other of his writings, especially The State and Revolution, written later that same year, Lenin did give 'socialism' a different meaning. He has the coercive State existing not only during the period when classes are being abolished (which Marx and Engels accepted and advocated) but, contrary to the views of Marx and Engels, also after classes had been abolished and right up until the time that it becomes possible to implement 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs'. As has been seen this would not have made sense to Marx since, on his view, the coercive State was exclusively a feature of class society which would disappear as soon as even the first stage of a classless society had been established, a view Morris, as a Marxist, inherited.

Lenin's argument for the continuance of the State into his period of so-called 'socialism' is confused and contradictory, but seems to be this: As long as it is not possible to have full free access to consumer goods and services, then individual consumption must be restricted. But if individual consumption is to be restricted, there must be some external institution to
do the restricting, but what? (This, incidentally, is a neat illustration of Lenin’s elitist frame of mind; to him it was apparently inconceivable that people could themselves voluntarily and democratically agree on some method of restricting their consumption). It would be, answered Lenin, the State:

Until the ‘higher’ phase of communism arrives, the Socialists demand the strictest control by society and by the state of the measure of labour and the measure of consumption (Lenin’s emphasis).

For the state to wither away completely complete communism is necessary.9

Lenin went on to insist that the State would probably take a long time to wither away because it would take a long time to reach complete Communism:

... we are entitled to speak only of the inevitable withering away of the state, emphasizing the protracted nature of this process and its dependence upon the rapidity of development of the higher phase of communism, ... (Lenin’s emphasis).10

This is a gross distortion of Marx’s views, but Lenin had a very good reason for this. He was writing just before the Bolshevik coup and had his eye all the time on what a Bolshevik government would be able to do in Russian conditions. He knew that the coercive State would have to exist for a long time after any Bolshevik seizure of power and, in order to make their policies appear to be Marxist, had to make Marx seem to say that the State would take a very long time to wither away.

Lenin’s views later became codified as Bolshevik ideology under the contradictory name of ‘Marxism-Leninism’. So codified, Leninism says that the State must continue to exist throughout the period of so-called ‘socialism’ in order to, in theory, carry out three tasks: (a) to enforce the rationing of consumption according to work done; (b) to see that people did do their share of work; and (c) to educate people in ‘communist morality’ so that eventually they would be ready for a system of voluntary work and free access.

This ideology is only relevant for us here because it has been inherited (with one significant exception which will be noted later) by Meier who in turn is attempting to pass it off as
Morris' view. A number of examples of what Meier has Morris saying are offered so that the point at issue can be seen clearly:

Morris... envisage, bon gré mal gré, la nécessité d’un État centralisé pendant tout le premier stade avant que la société communautiste puisse s’instaurer (p. 286).

... le premier stade est, aux yeux de Morris, une affaire de longue haleine et de plusieurs générations (p. 433).

... de la théorie marxiste des deux stades et du dépérissement de l’État au second stade (p. 466). Toute la pensée utopique de Morris est fondée sur la théorie marxiste des deux stades (p. 474).

Morris ne nia jamais, nous l’avons vu, qu’au premier stade, le contrainte serait dans certains cas nécessaire et qu’un pouvoir d’État, parfois répressif, était inévitable (p. 537).

Ce choix des besoins, cette adaptation des travailleurs à leur tâche et de la production à la consommation, facteurs indispensables de l’abondance, seront des opérations malaisées, lentes et pénibles... et, dans le premier stade, elle ne pourront s’effectuer que par voie autoritaire, sous le contrôle de l’État... (p. 558).

Ces détails d’organisation de la production et de l’abondance relèvent entièrement du pouvoir d’État dans la période socialiste... (p. 559).

Did Morris really think that Society would have to pass through such a long and nightmarish period of State regulation and coercion before people could finally liberate themselves by establishing a non-coercive society of equals? Anyone familiar with his political writings will know that there is a clear case for at once indignantly saying ‘No, of course he did not’, but it is necessary to be fair to Meier and give his theme a proper examination since he has taken the trouble to document his claim with many references to Morris’ own writings.

As has been said earlier Meier was not entirely wrong in his interpretation of Morris’ political views. Morris was indeed not a utopian in the sterile sense of merely painting a beautiful picture of a perfect future society without considering its practicability or how it might be achieved. He was for a number of years a very active member of a largely Marxian socialist organisation which held that a classless socialist society, based on the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production, could only be established
by the revolutionary political action of a socialist-minded working class majority. Morris was not an anarchist in that, though he stood for a society without coercive government or State, he advocated that the way to establish such a society was through the working class capturing the State and using it to abolish capitalist minority-class rule, before rapidly dismantling the State itself. So he did believe in a short political transition period between capitalist and classless society during which the working class would be using State power to abolish classes.

Thus Meier is right to criticise those who claim that Morris did not advocate any transitional period after the working class capture of power, but advocating the temporary use of the State to abolish classes is not at all the same as envisaging the continuance of the State after classes have been abolished right up until it becomes possible to have free access to consumer goods and services.

How long did Morris think that the State would continue to exist after the capture of political power by the socialist-minded working class? In Chapters XVII (‘How The Change Came’) and XVIII (‘The Beginnings of The New Life’) of News from Nowhere, the Revolution and civil war during which the working class organised to finally overthrow capitalist rule lasted two years after which ‘a system of life founded on equality and Communism’ was established—not, indeed, the ‘pure Communism’ mentioned earlier but Communism nevertheless insofar as class monopoly and privilege was ended. There is no mention of the State or State Socialism after the Revolution, not even in the ‘beginnings’ of the new classless society. In fact the only reference to ‘State Socialism’ is to something that happened before the Revolution, when the capitalist government tried to allay working class discontent by a policy of social reform and public works.

Meier finds this expression State Socialism ‘tres embarrassante’ (p. 438). Indeed it is odd in that it is from a Marxist point of view a contradiction in terms since, as we saw, the existence of the State and Socialism is incompatible, socialism (even in its early stages) being a society without any
coercive machinery of government. But this is not quite what Meier had in mind! What is embarrassing for him is that Morris used this term with reference to a policy pursued by governments within capitalism. To back up his theme Meier would have preferred Morris to have placed so-called State Socialism after, not before, the capture of power by the working class.

Actually, in view of then current usage, it was natural that Morris should place any period of 'State Socialism' within capitalism not socialism. For 'State Socialism' meant not a new system of society but merely State action on behalf of the poor, such as the policy being carried out by Bismarck in Germany at this time. 11 Obviously, the State could only take action to try to benefit the poor in a society which was still divided into rich and poor. Equally obviously, once classes had been abolished and there were no longer any rich or poor, such a policy would be quite meaningless.

It is, however, conceivable that in the period immediately following the working class capture of political power and before the actual abolition of classes some of the immediate measures adopted by the new working class administration might have such a 'State Socialist' character. Morris seems to hint at this once or twice, and indeed the ten immediate measures of the German Communist League in 1848 which Marx and Engels included in their *Communist Manifesto* were of this kind.

A better term for what Morris meant by 'State Socialism' would be 'reformism' or 'State capitalism'. Morris frequently expressed the view that before the class monopoly was ended capitalist governments, maybe under pressure from the working class, would adopt a 'State Socialist' policy of this kind. He himself was opposed to such a policy, but nevertheless felt it would inevitably be tried.

That Morris did envisage society passing through what we have suggested might better be called a state capitalist stage is not open to question. 12 The point at issue is not whether he believed this, but when he believed it would happen: before or after the socialist revolution? Meier answers 'after', apparently on the assumption that as Morris used the word
'socialism' he must have been referring to a time after the end of capitalism. But, as has been seen, the term ‘State Socialism’, as used at this time, by no means implied the abolition of capitalism. Quite the opposite in fact: it was the name of a policy to try to save capitalism by means of social reforms aimed at allaying working class discontent. Which was one reason why Morris was opposed to it. In view of this there is a clear case for saying that Morris placed the adoption of such a policy before the final abolition of capitalism, as, so to say, the last phase of class-divided capitalist society rather than (as Meier claims) the first phase of classless socialist society.

It is now time to consider Morris' distinction between 'socialism' and 'communism' as the first and higher phases of classless society. Though Morris' usage was by no-means clear-cut and consistent as Meier suggests, it is certainly true that Morris did call the 'first stage of incomplete Communism', when there could not yet be free access according to need, 'socialism'; but Morris, despite the similarity in terminology with Lenin, meant what Marx meant by 'the first phase of communist society' (where there would be no State because there would be no classes) rather than what Lenin meant by 'socialism' (where there would continue to be a coercive and repressive State).

For Marx, as has been seen, the basic difference between the first and higher stages of communist society lay in the method of distributing wealth for individual consumption: in the former stage there would still be some restrictions, in the latter there would be free access. On a number of occasions Morris made it clear that this was his view too. In *Communism* (1893), discussing 'the incomplete 1st stages of a society of equality—a society only tending to equality', Morris summarises the position: 'The means of production communized but the resulting wealth still private property'. By which he meant that what people consumed would still depend on what they personally had contributed towards production in the forms of hours of work. So there would still be a link between personal effort and personal consumption, whereas in 'complete communism' there would be no such
link: everybody would have free access to goods and services according to individual need, irrespective of the amount of work they performed. There is no mention at all of there also being another difference between incomplete and complete communism, namely, the existence in the first stage of a coercive State to enforce restrictions on consumption. Nor can any evidence for such a view be found in any of Morris’ writings. Indeed, on one occasion Meier himself, forgetting his theme, discloses the true position when he says, in parenthesis, ‘seul le mode de repartition des richesses produites distinguant le deux stades’ (p. 511)!

Meier appears to be under the impression that it was a great theoretical feat for anyone, in the 1880’s before the publication of Marx’s *Critique of the Catha Programme* in 1891, to have come to the conclusion that the principle ‘from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs’ could not have been implemented immediately had a classless society been set up at that time. For this is what Morris was saying. Meier finds it incredible that Morris should have been able to work this out all on his own.

Malgré notre sincère admiration pour son génie et notre refus de ne voir en lui qu’un rêveur, il nous est difficile de croire qu’il ait pu s’élever tout seul a ce niveau théorique (p. 409).

Meier offers as an explanation the wild speculation, without any supporting evidence whatsoever, that Engels must have shown Morris Marx’s 1875 notes at one of their meetings! This is most unlikely on a number of grounds.

First, Morris’ view was not all that amazing. Any intelligent socialist, surveying the level of development of the means of production in the 1880’s, would have reached the same conclusion as Marx did in the 1870’s: that in the early stages of classless communist society there would have to be some restrictions on consumption and that free access according to individual need would not be possible for a number of years, until the means of production had been further developed. Morris could quite easily have reached this conclusion on his own.

Second, Morris, as already seen, tended to call the first stage ‘socialism’ and the second ‘communism’. This was defi-
ninitely something he did not get from a reading of Marx’s 1875 notes. For, as we saw, in these notes Marx does not speak of ‘socialism’ and ‘communism’ but of the ‘first’ and ‘higher’ phases of ‘communist society’. In fact he and Engels always used the two words ‘socialism’ and ‘communism’ interchangeably to refer to future classless society, and never as the names of two successive phases of it.

Third, why should Engels show these notes to Morris, whom he did not know very well and whose theoretical ability he did not value too highly, rather than to his much closer friends and political associates like Kautsky, Lafargue or Bernstein? Meier’s suggestion about Engels showing these notes of Marx to Morris is really quite unreasonable and quite unnecessary. In trying to show that Morris was a Marxist, Meier overstates his (unanswerable) case here. In fact one criticism that could be made of his book is that he exaggerates the influence of Engels on William Morris while playing down the influence of the anarcho-communist Kropotkin. Not that Morris was an anarchist; he was a Marxist who differed from Kropotkin in insisting that the working class must take political action to establish (stateless) Socialism. But he was on much closer personal terms with Kropotkin than Engels, and may well have got some of his arguments against ‘State Socialism’ from Kropotkin, who was always denouncing the German Social Democrats for standing for this (or state capitalism, as he once more accurately put it) rather than real Socialism.

On one point, and it is of great significance, concerning the method of distributing wealth in the first stage, the evidence of Morris’ views is so clearly against him supporting what happened in Russia after 1917 that Meier is forced to record a disagreement and to denounce him for ouvrierisme:

A dire vrai, Morris ne semble pas sur ce point manifester autant de patience et de mesure que sur d’autres, et le nivellement des salaires lui paraît nécessaire dès le premier stade (p. 565).

Morris reste résolument opposé à la rémunération exceptionnelle d’aptitudes ou de talents particuliers (p. 566).

It is not without significance in this connexion that earlier
Meier criticises Morris for being 'idealistic' in using the phrase 'society of equality' rather than 'society without classes' to refer to future society. This is pure Stalinism, as will be seen. In insisting that there should be no special rewards for more skilled work or for mental work, Morris was only consistently applying one of the implications of the labour-time voucher system mentioned by Marx and popular amongst Socialists at that time as the means for regulating consumption in the early stages of classless socialist society. For, under this system, a person's contribution to society would be measured solely by the number of hours of work performed, irrespective of the type of work. As Morris pointed out, in the first incomplete stage of Communism the only way to get more than the next man would be to work longer. Morris saw no reason whatsoever why people doing more skilled work should get more than those doing less skilled work, especially as the former were very likely to find their work more pleasant and enjoyable anyway; that would be their extra reward. Even Edward Bellamy, whose utopia *Looking Backward* spurred Morris to write a more human and acceptable utopia in *News from Nowhere*, advocated equality of consumption.

Although Marx only put forward the labour-time voucher system as a suggestion which need not necessarily have been rigidly adhered to had Socialism been established in the 1870's (indeed, as he himself pointed out, it would give rise to various anomalies), he too clearly favoured what Meier calls 'levelling of wages'. In his comments on the Paris Commune Marx commended the Communards for insisting that all public service had to be done 'at workmen's wages', i.e., that no special privileges in the distribution of products should be given to those involved in administrative or political work during the transition period between capitalism and socialism. Lenin, too, favoured this policy, even in his first stage where, he said:

> All citizens are transformed into hired employees of the state, which consists of armed workers. All citizens become employees and workers of a single nation-wide state 'syndicate'. All that is required is that they should work equally, do their proper share of work, and get equally paid (Lenin's emphasis).
The whole of society will have become a single office and a single factory, with equality of labour and equality of pay.

Early in the same work, *State and Revolution*, Lenin wrote:

To organise the whole national economy on the lines of the postal service, so that the technicians, foremen, bookkeepers, as well as all officials, shall receive salaries no higher than 'a workman's wage', all under the control and leadership of the armed proletariat—this is our immediate aim (Lenin's emphasis).¹⁵

When, after the Bolshevik seizure of power, Lenin found that his government had to pay very high salaries to technicians and specialists in order to retain their services, he openly said that this was a step backwards from the ideal of equal wages.

It is not from Marx or Morris or even Lenin that Meier derives his opposition to 'wage levelling'—but from Stalin. In the 1930's Stalin and the others in the emerging new privileged class in Russia found it highly inconvenient to be tied to an ideology which insisted that all State officials, from the top downwards, should be paid an ordinary worker's wage. Accordingly a campaign was launched against 'leftist blockheads' who insisted on sticking to, or at least trying to make progress towards, Lenin's policy of wage equality. Speaking to the 17th Congress of the Bolshevik Party in 1934, Stalin said:

These people evidently think that Socialism calls for equality, for levelling the requirements and the personal lives of the members of society. Needless to say, such an assumption has nothing in common with Marxism, with Leninism. By equality Marxism means, not equality in personal requirements and personal life, but the abolition of class.¹⁶

Needless to say, Stalin's policy triumphed; advocacy of 'wage levelling' became a sure way of ending up in a forced labour camp—or worse.

This is why Meier's admission of a difference with Morris on this point is so significant. For it shows that, even if Morris had accepted the Bolshevik coup as a socialist revolution (which is unlikely in view of its character as a minority coup), he would scarcely have regarded Russia as now being in a period of transition towards complete Communism. Far more likely that he would have regarded Russia as having ended up in the slough of 'State Socialism' which he always feared might
might be the outcome of a premature working class uprising. Morris, in short, would have described present-day Russia as, in modern Marxist terminology, State capitalism.

I hope that, in the course of this essay, I have managed to clear Morris of Meier’s contention that he would have been a supporter of the Russian government and system. The real Morris stood not for a long, difficult and repressive transition period before a classless, Stateless, moneyless society could be established. He stood rather for a short, though probably violent, political transition period during which the class monopoly of the means of production would be ended and a classless, non-coercive society of equality established. Reasonably enough for the 1880’s, he believed that for some while, perhaps for a generation, this classless society of equals would not be able to implement the full communist ideal of ‘from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs’. Eventually, however, it would.

Morris' political ideas are still very relevant today, especially as we are that much nearer to being able to realise the society of equals, based on common ownership and democratic control of the means of production, with freely-chosen and enjoyable work and free access to useful and beautiful things according to individual need, which Morris always insisted was the real aim of Socialists.

FOOTNOTES

1 See Capital (Moscow, 1961), I, p. 78, and (Moscow, 1957), II, p. 358.


3 For, as Marx explained elsewhere, labour-time vouchers would not be money: ‘Owen's “labour-money” ... is no more “money” than a ticket to the theatre' (Capital, I, p. 94). ‘These vouchers are not money. They do not circulate’ (Capital, II, p. 358).


5 'The working class, in the course of its development, will substitute for the old civil society an association which will exclude classes and
their antagonism, and there will be no more political power properly so-called, since political power is precisely the official expression of antagonism in civil society’ [The Poverty of Philosophy (Moscow, 1956), p. 197]. ‘Political power, properly so-called, is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another’ [Communist Manifesto (Moscow, 1954), p. 81].


7 Socialism, Utopian and Scientific (Socialist Labour Press: Glasgow, 1918), pp. 76–7. Some translations, emanating from Moscow, of the same passage translate ‘It dies out’ as ‘It withers away’ for reasons we explain in the main text.


9 The State and Revolution (Moscow, n.d.), p. 155 and p. 151 respectively.

10 Ibid., p. 153.

11 Thus, after leaving the Social Democratic Federation in 1884, Morris described Hyndman’s reformist policy as ‘a sort of Bismarckian State Socialism’ (The Letters of William Morris to his Family and Friends, ed. Philip Henderson (Longmans, Green & Co, 1950), p. 228). See also the Ninth edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica on ‘Socialism’, where Thomas Kirkup mentions ‘the various forms of State Socialism, which are all examples of state action on behalf of the poor, especially of the use of public resources for that purpose’. This particular volume was published in 1887.

12 For instance, one of his letters to the Rev. George Bainton in April 1888 (Letters, p. 288) and his letter to Mrs Burne-Jones in July of the same year (Letters, pp. 292–3).


14 ‘Ouvrierism’ is a term of abuse aimed at ‘bourgeois intellectuals’ who idealise the industrial working class.

15 The State and Revolution, p. 161, p. 162 and pp. 80–1 respectively.