

'news from nowhere' analysis of william morris



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Introduction

In this essay I will analyse how William Morris's *News from Nowhere* and the nineteenth century ecological ideology will shape the vision of the world around humanity. How Morris wanted to design a world that was to him becoming gloomy and joyless, a world that is being separated by industrialist and capitalist systems who have turned everything of value into profit making, although he believes both industrialism and capitalism go hand in hand. My focus will be on how these ideologies are organised in utopian imaginative narration

Utopia meaning an imaginary society, place or state considered to be perfect and ideal and could not exist anywhere. But on the other hand that leaves a question can it, society be improved? *News from Nowhere* exists with visions of the future and also seeks to defend and uphold the revolutionary function of such expectation and hope. It strikes out as a book that is a little different from today.

William Morris was a man of many talents, an artist, poet, carpenter, manufacturer, activist, and a socialist during the late 19th century. Later in his life he became a graphic designer.

He was born March of 1834 in Walthamstow, England into a wealthy family. He went to school at an early age, studied at Oxford and became interested

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in art and architecture. At a later part of his life he became interested in politics and textile designs

Main body

The book tells about beautiful scenery and good weather; ...air just sharp enough to be refreshing... (News from Nowhere, chapter 1) is an indication of climate changes which for decades now have been a challenge facing the planet today. The problem that comes from climate change has caused many unfriendly problems that the world is facing that have resulting into different problems such as deaths, diseases, and dryness from deserts, water shortages, etc. It is up to the leaders of the world to make necessary changes so as to save the future of the planet.

William Morris had an idea of a perfect world and hopeful of what the future might bring, and one of the impressive characters of the ideal world is the freedom of every man and woman to be in control of his/her own destiny. A world that is free from oppression and full of opportunities. Morris more than most people, had set up himself with a good start in life as far as career wise.

By his adulthood he had already accomplished some tremendous success, created his firm, developed and exploited his talents to the full, basically he had made himself wealthy and this brought more success to his later careers as an independent actor on the political and social scene as he wished.

After he left school he never exposed himself to where someone could be telling him what to do or taking orders from people except on certain

occasions he had encounter with the law. He was not a selfish person, as he was a privileged man; he wanted the same for every person. A society without statue or privilege is what Morris wanted (Harvey and Press, 1996)

Morris claims that the society is full of evil and that capitalism has destroyed what is left of the society but with communism it can be revived

(Geoghegan, 2008) Morris saw in medieval craft labour an anticipation of what free labour in communism will be like. During the medieval periods craftspeople did not experience the type of degradation that labours have been subjected to under capitalism; that is between intellectual and manual and intellectual labour, between great art and manufacture, and also between pleasure and work. Morris believes that it is possible for man to rejoice in his work, and not only the labours that can make one rejoice, the products represent the height of human achievement to date. He rejected mass production, but rather encouraged those to develop their own manual skills such as were necessary to, and enjoyable in the domestic environment.

In 1876 Morris wrote a letter to the Daily News protesting against Conservative government's policy in the Balkans who offered the Turks military support the Russian expansionism in order to protect their interests in the Near East. Morris's letter gave voice to the feelings and reaction of the people's demonstration against this move especially a significant section of British opinion, particularly the liberals who resented their government being in war against Turks killing and massacre of Bulgarians.

Morris's letter within a couple of weeks had brought him popularity, after a short while he was elected Treasurer of the Eastern Question Association.

This association was formed to campaign and protest against anticipation for war (Morris, 2004)

Violence in the streets across the globe today are not new, they can be associated with Morris's thought about revolution. As we witness today that democracy is sweeping across some parts of the world like the Arab countries. Its citizens are now demonstrating for changes in their government and demanding accountability and transparency. An example is couple of years back; the changes of regimes among North African countries, Egypt, Algeria, and Libya are evident of changes that came about through revolution.

In 1885 Morris wrote to Georgiana Burne-Jones that the early struggles of socialism are merely ' the petty skirmish of outposts, the fight of a corporal's guard'; he tells the James Frederick that now he has joined the socialists, he has become ' a soldier of the cause'. At the same time, he affirms the possibility that actual violence may be necessary for political change (Hanson, 2013, p. 165)

News from Nowhere makes us to understand that Morris motivated a happier society through the satisfactions of creative work. As he says in his preface to the nature of Gothic, " the lesson which Ruskin here teaches us is that art is the expression of man's pleasure in labour" (Morris, 2004) he went further to say changed conditions of labour would not only produce better art but happier individuals more capable of enjoying it.

He was not opposed to machines as a matter of principle. A lot of people believe he opposes them. He supports labour saving devices where dullness

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was not concerned. He said that the use of machines will speed production thereby doing those hard labour and saving human extra time and strength. But he criticised the use of machine for increase of production so as to make profit for the capitalists.

Morris became the treasurer of the largely working-class National League. He formed a good relation with working people who had been empowered by the 1832 Reform Bill; the middle classes who are the driving force behind the nation's wealth and power. Because of its success the franchise was extended to wider sections of working class which attracted new voters. His aim was for workers to be in charge of their own lives. Workers should organise and have trade unions through which they will make their voice heard, issues like wages, temporary managers, number of hours, care and sick payment, the dismissed, and the unemployed and general working conditions.

After the revolution of 1848, things changed for good as a result of extension of the suffrage of 1867, increasing prosperity and liberal reforms, the rise of the trade unions all contributed to the improvement of things.

Morris believed in " Socialism from the Root Up" (Morris, 2004) fundamental change brought about by sudden popular revolution. He worked hard and treated his work for league as a full time job. During Morris's time the league fought for free speech campaign so as to possess the right to protest and carry out public demonstrations.

In this process he was arrested and fined on some occasions at the Trafalgar Square. Just as it is in the world today people are demonstrating against

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governments, companies, or institutions on policies that are against their democratic rights. Today in Ireland the people are demonstrating against the new water charge imposed by the government

Change does not come by peaceful means, but through struggles. It was through this circumstance as the Socialist League drew nearer disintegration that prompted Morris to write *News from Nowhere*, a book that combines continuing trust in a Socialist future with a need to recharge the batteries of an imagination near exhaustion (Morris, 2004)

Morris stressed not only the importance of political party but for the party to be a party of cadres, highly trained and qualified personnel of theoretical understanding, capable of assuming a leading role in any revolutionary activities towards the working class. He made it clear that the Socialist League should stand for revolutionary and scientific Socialism as against Hyndman's SDF (Social Democratic Federation) for the fact that he believes Hyndman and SDF method will only achieve what he Morris called 'mechanical revolution', which is not real revolution. On the contrary Morris demanded 'an educated movement' (Researchgate. net)

Morris believes that old order must not take charge but if they persist, then they must be removed by force, that is when necessary to use intelligent revolution which is for the good of the people. He wanted far above every other thing body of able high-minded working class, experienced, knowledgeable and skilled men who will teach and direct the general population during critical moments of any movement.

He had a strong disapproval towards opportunism which will involve him in alliance with other parties at the long run will lead to electioneering and deprive the socialist movement some of its best leaders by sending them pretentious parliament, where they will become useless.

Morris hammered on the importance of education especially in the party system so as to have a strong party which comprises education in economics, in organisation, and also administratively. He went further to say without an organised political party to provide a concrete and theoretical awareness and existence of socialism, any sudden revolt would bring it to scatter in various directions.

On the issue of gender, Morris was aware of the apparent reaction of the solution regarding the woman question, just as he was conscious of the conservative and emotional implications of his desire to give new life to the handicraft. But he did not temper his belief that house work was the natural realm of the woman, they do it excellently well, and that a woman's natural vocation was to provide help and comfort for her children and the head of the family. In the book there is an open rejection by Morris on movement of freedom with regards to central demand as the right to free the more intelligent part of their sex from the bearing of children. The domestic workers in the book are independent, athletic, active, and passionate, they are never worn down by their work, always good-natured and extremely beautiful. Perhaps is not surprising that Morris confessed that he had fallen in love with Ellen.

Conclusion

William Morris's *News from Nowhere* is an interesting book with a vision. Despite the fact it was written in 1890, it contains arguments and debate that will inspire every generation to come; of all sectors both students, workers, politicians to look beyond the immediate system and virtualise future.

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