

A LETTER OF ELEANOR MARX-AVELING¹ TO HER SISTER LAURA LAFARGUE²

How Karl Marx's youngest daughter saw the foundation of the Socialist League, 31 December 1884.

	London 31.XII.84	
	My dear Laura,	
05-	I feel very guilty — and yet I am sure you would forgive my long silence if you knew how little time I've had for writing letters. But you do know — for you have been a good deal « driven » too. — I suppose you heard from Engels — he and Nym will never cease chaffing us I fear — how Edward ³ and I waited <i>outside</i> Charing Cross while you were <i>inside</i> the Station. I was so vexed not to say goodbye to you ! We have been hoping that something might « turn up » and that we should be able to run over to Paris for at least a few days — but nothing has turned up, and tho' the spirit is willing, the purse, as you well know, is very weak. ⁴ However we haven't given up hope. Edward is a perfect Micawber ⁵ in this respect, and still waits confidently for the « something » that is to set us up. —	65-
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15-	I know you'll be wanting to hear how things have gone at the Federation. ⁶ — into all the details I need not go. You and Paul ⁷ have had your Brousse ⁸ — and we have simply had the same experience here that you have been, and are going through, with the Possibilists. Apart from the disgraceful vilification of everyone to whom he personally objected as not being a « follower » of himself, Hyndman forced things to such a condition that it was impossible to go on working with him. — The personal question — inevitably personal questions will be mixed up in all such movements as these — is after all very secondary to the principal (Ed. A.) one, — that of whether we were to sink into a merely Tory-democratic Party, or to go on working on the lines of the German Socialists and the French Parti Ouvrier. — In the motion brought forward by Morris of confidence in Scheu ⁹ (whom Hyndman has been maligning most shamefully) and of want of confidence in Hyndman we had a majority, although — a most unusual course — the chairman voted, and Hyndman had brought together all his « party ». Having gained this point we [rose] next in a body, gave our resignation as members of the Federation Council. Our majority was too small to make it possible for us to really get rid of the Jingo Faction ¹⁰ , and so, after due consultation with Engels ¹¹ , we decided to go out, and form a new organisation. This is to be called the Socialist League. Bax ¹² is anxious that we should issue a weekly paper. But Engels is dead against this so we shall probably, for the present, content ourselves with a monthly journal. ¹³ The General ¹⁴ has promised, now we are rid of the unclean elements in the Federation, to help us; many others who have till now stood aloof will come to us also, we shall of course (through Engels) have the Germans with us, and we also count on the Parti Ouvrier. A short statement will be drawn up and sent by us to the various	75-
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130	I heard about Longuet ²⁸ and the little ones through Engels. When you write do tell me about them, there's a dear. Poor little things ! I do so long to see them. I need not say that I have not had a line from Longuet ! There is not much other news to give. We are all much the same as you left us. Edward	135	and I dream of going to see you — but I confess I don't see how we're to realize our dream. Meantime dear good-bye and a happy New Year to you both.—Do write.
		140	Your Tussy. ²⁹

Quoted pp. 841-842 in Paul MEIER, *La pensée utopique de William Morris*, Paris: Editions sociales, 1972, 862 p. Notes by F. Poirier

1. Eleanor (1855-1898), the youngest daughter of Karl Marx (1818-1883), "common law wife" of English socialist, darwinist and atheist Dr. Edward Aveling (1849-1898).
2. Laura (1845-1911), the second daughter of Karl Marx, married to French socialist Paul Lafargue (1842-1911).
3. Edward Aveling.
4. Aveling had been expelled from his post as lecturer in anatomy at the London Hospital because of his statements on atheism.
5. A character in Charles Dickens's novel *David Copperfield* (1849), always hoping something good will "turn up".
6. The Social Democratic Federation. Founded by Henry Mayers Hyndman (1842-1921) as the Democratic Federation in 1881, it became the Social Democratic Federation in 1884.
7. Paul Lafargue.
8. Dr Paul Brousse (1844-1912), founded the Parti socialiste possibiliste in 1882, by seceding from Lafargue's and Jules Guesdes's Parti ouvrier français. He had begun his political career as an anarchist, before turning to the advocacy of reformist policies.
9. Andreas Scheu (1844-1927), a leading Austrian socialist, had been a member of the First international. He emigrated to England in 1874 and was a founder-member of Hyndman's SDF. He had been accused by Hyndman of being "an anarchist and a dynamiter". Scheu had been able to prove to Morris's satisfaction a fortnight before that the accusation was groundless, and this confirmed Morris's suspicions regarding Hyndman. At the meeting of the SDF executive here alluded to, Scheu came along with documentary evidence of Hyndman's disparaging lies.
10. "By Jingo" being the chorus of a popular, rather nationalistic song ("Macdermott's war song" or "By Jingo") at the time of an Anglo-Russian period of tension over events in the Ottoman Empire, the word Jingo and its derivatives Jingoism and Jingoistic were soon applied to the description of chauvinistic and imperialist attitudes among Britons. See <http://www.univ-paris13.fr/ANGLICISTES/POIRIER/Partitions/Partitions.htm>. Incidentally, it is the Jingo tension of 1878 which first moved William Morris to take a stand in politics, and led him to break with the Liberals.
11. Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), the closest friend and collaborator of Karl Marx's, he remained an avuncular figure for the Marx family and the voice of legitimacy for anybody claiming to follow Marx's ideas.
12. Ernest Belfort Bax (1854-1918), a friend and political collaborator of William Morris.
13. *The Commoweal* will indeed begin as a monthly, with William Morris as editor and Edward Aveling his deputy.
14. An affectionate nickname for Engels within the Marx circle.
15. Jules Guesde (1845-1922), a propagandist of Marxism in France and co-founder of French Parti ouvrier with Lafargue in 1879.
16. *Justice* was the weekly newspaper of the Social-Democratic Federation.
17. Adolphe Smith Headingley, a journalist who had made a name as the writer of text in the first photographic album on working-class London: John Thomson & Adolphe Smith, *Street Life in London*, London: S. Low & Co., 1877, reproduced as *Victorian London Street Life in Historic Photographs*, New York: Dover Publications, 1994, 134 p. As a member of the First International, he had opposed Marx in 1871. A member of the SDF, he turned to the possibilists and wrote slanderous articles against Marx and his associates in 1884.
18. Henry Hyde Champion (1859-1928), was the editor of *Justice*. He was later expelled from the SDF, edited *The Labour Elector* in 1888 with Tom Mann and John Burns, contributed to Annie Besant's *The Link*, played a leading role in the 1889 London dock strike. He then joined first the Fabian Society, and later the Independent Labour Party. He emigrated to Australia in 1894. In 1884, it had been discovered that he and Hyndman had accepted money from the Conservative party so as to help them run SDF candidates who would split the Liberal vote.
19. Frost. See Bellamy *et al.*
20. *To-Day*, another socialist newspaper, first launched by E. Belfort Bax, but hijacked by the Hyndman clique.
21. Hyndman had accused Eleanor Marx of forging a letter in connexion with the Lafargues, i.e. the French Marxists. Laura's new letter stated the truth of the matter.
22. Jean-Baptist von Schweitzer (1833-1875), Ferdinand Lassalle (1825-1864), Wilhelm Liebknecht (1826-1900): three leading German marxists, whose quarrel led to Liebknecht's expulsion from Lassalle's ADAV (Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein, "General German Workers' Association"). Marx and Engels had been in close contact with Liebknecht since the 1840s, and he remained a close friend of Marx's and his family to the end.
23. Jules Vallès (1832-1885), French novelist, journalist and ex-Communard, editor of *Le Cri du Peuple*.
24. *La Bataille*, a French radical periodical.
25. *La Défense des travailleurs*, a periodical published by Parti ouvrier français.
26. Seat of the just founded (the day before!) Socialist League.
27. The persons mentioned in this paragraph are mostly relatives or relatives' friends.
28. Jenny (1844-1883), Marx's eldest daughter, was the wife of Charles Longuet (1833-1903), the French socialist and ex-Communard, and one of Marx's first translators into French. Jenny, the mother of six children, had died in January 1883, shortly before her father, and Longuet was moving steadily towards the possibilists of Paul Brousse, so that the relationship with his sisters-in-law were strained.
29. Tussy was the nickname of Eleanor Marx within her family and circle of close friends.