

Call for Papers

Fiction in Victorian and Edwardian Socialist Periodicals



RSVP/VPFA Online Study Day
5-6 February 2027

Keynote Speaker: Florence Boos (University of Iowa)
Co-Organizers: Betty Hagglund and Lisa Robertson

The socialist movement emerged in Victorian Britain during the 1880s with the foundation of the Democratic Federation (later the Social Democratic Federation) in 1881, the Fabian Society in 1884, and the Socialist League in 1885. Alongside the political developments ran a rich seam of socialist fiction, both novel length and short form. **Like the Chartists before them, socialists used fiction as a vehicle for political discourse, shaping it for a popular audience. The majority of it was published within periodicals, never reaching book form. This online study day, the first co-organised by RSVP and VPFA, will bring together scholars from both societies to share knowledge and build expertise about understudied popular authors and genres, complex multidisciplinary forms, and the material print genre of socialist periodicals.**

Michael Rosen (2018) has argued that, 'In Britain, the ideas of socialism embodied many strands of intertwined thought and activity, owing their thought to very different – sometimes contradictory – traditions.' The fiction which emerged during this period

reflected those often-conflicting ideologies and factions. It was presented in a multiplicity of genres, including science fiction, fairy tales, fables, moral tales, realist novels, humorous stories, mystery stories, romances and utopias.

Many authors of such texts are familiar to us – George Bernard Shaw, Edith Nesbit, William Morris, H.G. Wells, Edward Carpenter, Margaret Harkness – while others have remained more obscure and less known, although popular in their own time. Socialism was an international movement and many European, North American and Australian socialist novels enjoyed widespread English distribution and recognition, with influences running in both directions. Socialist periodicals were consumed by individual readers but also communally: in reading groups; lectures and meetings; informal 'worker's libraries' and reading rooms; and read aloud during services in the Labour Church. The use of fiction as part of collective activity is another research area that demands further exploration.

The [Research Society for Victorian Periodicals](#) and the [Victorian Popular Fiction Association](#) invite proposals for a joint study day on topics including but not limited to:

- Genre and socialist fiction, whether prose or poetry (i.e., epic, utopia, fable)
- Periodical publication and / or serialisation; the socialist periodical as a home for fiction
- Education versus entertainment in the socialist periodical
- Modes of reception
- Trans-Atlantic, Trans-European, and / or Imperial Socialist fiction
- Regional and / or dialect socialist fiction
- Religion and socialist fiction
- Gender in socialist fiction
- Relationship between socialist fiction and other movements and campaigns – eugenics, pacifism, social purity, temperance, pastoralism, feminism, sexual liberation, anticolonialism, anarchism, the cooperative and guild movements, etc.
- Individual writers, editors, proprietors, and / or texts
- Disagreements and splits within the socialist movement and the role of the periodical press

We welcome 300-word proposals for 20-minute papers. Panel proposals should include a 200-word panel abstract, as well as 300-word proposals for three 20-minute papers.

Please submit proposals, along with a short biography, to victoriansocialistperiodicals@protonmail.com. The deadline to submit proposals is **31 October 2026** and we hope to respond to all submissions by 14 November 2026. Please send any questions to victoriansocialistperiodicals@protonmail.com.

The conference online schedule will be timed to accommodate participants based in Europe, UK, and North America.