

## **Frank Field MP**

In early February I went in low spirits to the seminar **John Ruskin and the Modern World** and left with a renewed sense of political hope. The reason for this transformation is to be found in these two papers which were given after my introduction.

The morning's proceedings began with my commiserating with the large seminar that we lived in an age witnessing the true success of Thatcherism. There was now no political party of any substance who argued, let alone believed, that there was an alternative to the rampant capitalism that dominates practically the whole of the globe.

Up to Mrs T's remarkable success we had a Labour Party whose leaderships' minds had been crafted to some degree by Britain's home-grown ethical socialism. This tradition held out the possibility of a New Jerusalem one day being established in Britain's green and pleasant land. The roots of that ethical socialism dug deep over four centuries of radical politics and had, towards the end of that period, been much influenced by the prophecy of John Ruskin.

At the first ever meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party almost every Member, when asked what were the determining influences on their thinking, answered 'the works of Ruskin'. Clement Attlee, Labour's Prime Minister in the immediate post war period, recorded that Ruskin was the door through which he entered into the ethical socialism that so

beautified his life (Frank Field, **Attlee's Great Contemporaries**, Continuum, 2009).

I cannot help thinking that Ruskin would have had even greater influence if only he had chosen titles for his books that were intelligible to a reader like myself. Even so, here in this publication, we again have our spirits raised by Ruskin's work, and particularly **Unto This Last**. Amongst all his works – 39 volumes when collected into a uniform edition – here was the book, according to Kenneth Clark, that 'is one of the great prophetic books of the nineteenth century'.

Kenneth Clark continues

It pierces through the smoke-screen of classical economics, and reveals true human reality. It does so in a language of an apparent simplicity, but an attentive reader will recognise the style of a great virtuoso holding his passion and eloquence under control and concealing his skill with a show of innocence. (Kenneth Clark, **Ruskin Today**, Penguin Books, 1964)

So, good reader, read on and hopefully your spirits will be raised as mine were that Saturday morning not so long ago. And then I hope these two instructive essays will lead you to Clive Wilmer's edition of **Unto This Last**, also published by Penguin Books.

Well done, and thank you, Mr Ruskin.