

THE COMMONWEAL

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ONE PENNY.

FIRST GENERAL MEETING OF THE SOCIALIST LEAGUE.

Sunday, July 5, 1885.

HELD AT 13 FARRINGDON ROAD, LONDON, E.C.

THE first General Conference of the Socialist League will be remembered with pleasurable feelings by all that took part in it. It was a day of heartiness and good feeling; of realisation of hopes and the planning for future work. Whether the organisation founded in December last, and having its second birth, as it were, on Sunday, July 5, 1885, is to exist until the principles it works for are understood and accepted of men—whether it will ever be merged in a larger, wider, more international body; whether those gathered together on that Sunday will see in their time anything more than the lessened darkness of the sky before the dawn of the better day that is to come; whether any of them will be able to sing *Nunc dimittis* ere they depart—these are but secondary questions. The one thing of primary importance is that a veritable Socialist body is in existence, and is at work in England, the home of capitalism.

A genuine enthusiasm marked from first to last all that was done. Even the dry details of business reports were signals for cheering. In an assembly of men and women holding pronounced and advanced views, considerable difference of opinion upon points of detail and even, now and again, on larger questions, was assured. But even where the difference was marked enough to be called a divergence, all discussion was carried on with kindness and generosity. In one thing the Conference was unanimous—its earnestness for Socialism, its eagerness to do everything for the furthering of the cause.

And now the League is thoroughly on its feet. Its Council and officers have been chosen. The inspiration of our first gathering together is yet strong upon us. Our work lies before us. The hideous moastrosities, cruelties, and blasphemies due to capitalism, assail our every sense. Our fellows lie supine, or if they struggle at all, so fight they as those that fight the air. To work, then!

WILLIAM MORRIS.

EDWARD B. AVELING.

MORNING SITTING—11 to 1.30.

C. W. Mowbray proposed, and F. Lessner seconded, William Morris as Chairman.

C. W. Mowbray and Thomas Wardle, jun., were elected scrutineers on the motion of Lessner and Halliday.

Some discussion arose on the position of a member who had joined the League that day. It was ultimately decided that he could be present, but was not entitled to vote.

On the motion of Theodor and Mowbray, Edward Aveling, H. Halliday and J. L. Mahon were deputed to act as Secretaries to the Conference.

The Chairman, having read the agenda, said: Friends, though a speech is probably not expected of me, just a few words. The circumstances under which the League was formed are known to you all. Any body of Socialists have the right to make an association, as we have done, for the spread of revolutionary International Socialism. Their business, above all others, is to see that the doctrine is carried through purely, and not mixed with opportunism. The doctrine is a change in the basis of society. Of course, to some it seems absurd for a few people in an upper chamber to talk of this. But it is not we that are to effect this change, but the world of yesterday, to-day and to-morrow. We have to do with the past, the present and the future. We suffer many checks, some defeats, and not a little coldness at times amongst ourselves. We do not all of us always stick pertinaciously to the task, ready to make sacrifices in the certainty that things will change. For my part, I believe we shall see much of it in our own time. Now for the business of to-day. The Provisional Council, whose self-

appointment you endorsed in a measure by joining the League, will give you in their account. They ask for justice, and not charity, at your hands. I would beg of everybody to be ready to bear criticism in the interests of the cause. We are all friends, but must give no favour to one another, treating all as members of the party, and then there can be nothing personal in the criticism. Let us all speak our minds freely, and if we think mistakes have been made, name those that have made them, and then receive, and if possible accept, their explanation. Let us consider ourselves to-day and always members of the cause that we are leading in this country, and go straight forward to the end of the ideal we have in view. Let us remember that all other successes in arts, or what not, depend on the success of this movement. Although we are in a minority, we are entitled to feel, even as we walk about the streets, pride and exultation in the cause that we have at heart.

J. L. Mahon, as Secretary of the Provisional Council, read its report.

Report to the General Meeting of Members of the work of the Provisional Council of the Socialist League (July 5, 1885).

The Socialist League was formed December 30, 1884, at 27 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. At the first meeting were—Wm. Morris, S. Mainwaring, W. J. Clark, Eleanor Marx Aveling, Edward Aveling, E. Belfort Bax, James Davis, Joseph Lane, J. Cooper, John L. Mahon, Edward Watson and Robert Banner. A Provisional Council was elected to carry on the work of the League. That Council received several additions from time to time and is now constituted as follows:—W. Bridges Adams, Edward Aveling, Eleanor Marx Aveling, Robert Banner, E. Belfort Bax, Thomas Binning, Henry Charles, William J. Clark, J. Cooper, E. T. Craig, W. Hudson, Frank Kitz, Joseph Lane, Frederick Lessner, John L. Mahon, S. Mainwaring, William Morris, C. W. Mowbray, Chas. Theodor. *Provincial Members*—C. J. Faulkner (Oxford), Thomas Maguire (Leeds), James Mavor (Glasgow), Andreas Schou (Edinburgh). The officers of the League are:—Treasurer and Editor, William Morris; Secretary, John L. Mahon; Financial Secretary, Henry Charles; Sub-Editor, Edward Aveling.

There are now eight Branches of the League—at Hammersmith, Bloomsbury, Leeds, Merton Abbey, Bradford, Oxford, Stratford, North London—the aggregate membership of which is 160. In addition to Branch members, there are 70 members enrolled at the Central Office who do not belong to any Branch, thus making the total membership of the League about 230. There is also affiliated to the League, the Labour Emancipation League, Hoxton, and the Scottish Land and Labour League, with Branches at Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Publications.—The publications issued by the Provisional Council are—(1) The Manifesto of the League, of which 10,000 have been circulated. (2) The *Commonweal*, which will be dealt with in a separate report. (3) A Manifesto on the Soudan War, of which over 12,000 have been circulated. (4) Morris's Chants for Socialists, collected and published at one penny. (5) Socialist Leaflets (two), of which 14,000 have been circulated. (6) The first two numbers of a series of pamphlets, entitled the "Socialist Platform." Of these, No. 1 is "An Address to Trades' Unions;" 350 were distributed free among the engineers lately assembled in conference at Nottingham; and the sale of the second, "Useful Work v. Useless Toil," by William Morris, is proceeding satisfactorily; but it is impossible to give definite details of the sale of either, as they are quite recently issued and returns have not come in from the Branches and newsmen.

The chief public meetings carried out or taken part in by the League have been—

1. A course of 17 meetings at South Place Chapel, Finsbury, E.C. On fifteen evenings Edward Aveling gave a series of "Lessons in Socialism," being an explanation of Marx' "Das Kapital." On the other two evenings were a public meeting introductory to the Lessons and a Social Entertainment in conclusion. The attendance at the Lessons ranged from 40 to over 100.

2. A meeting was held at Neumeyer Hall, Bloomsbury, in celebration of the anniversary of the Paris Commune. The hall was filled with an enthusiastic audience, and the proceedings were of the most satisfactory nature.

3. A meeting was held at St. James's Hall on April 2, organised and presided over by Mr. Bradlaugh, M.P. The purpose of the meeting was to protest against the British military operations in the Soudan and demand their cessation. As the Council had issued a Manifesto on the subject and given prominence to a series of articles in their journal which dealt with the question in a manner distinctly different from that of any other party in the country, it was felt that some action must be taken in reference to the meeting. The resolutions to be submitted to the meeting were considered by the Council, and it was determined to send two delegates to the meeting to move a rider which contained an explanation of the cause and indicated the means of preventing the recurrence of such wars in the future. The rider was very well received by the meeting, but, owing to the trickery of Mr. Bradlaugh—who first cheated the League delegates out of their time and next confused the meeting when the vote was called for—the rider was lost.

4. On April 23 a meeting to protest against the War was organised by the League. Immediately before the meeting the announcement of the