

THE COMMONWEAL

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE SOCIALIST LEAGUE.

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ONE PENNY

INTRODUCTORY.

Before our readers' leave for a few words in which to introduce to them this Socialist journal, THE COMMONWEAL. In the first place we ask them to understand that the Editor and Sub-Editor of THE COMMONWEAL are acting as delegates of the Socialist League, and under its direct control: any slip in principles, therefore, any mis-statement of the aims or tactics of the League, are liable to correction from the representatives of that body.

As to the conduct of THE COMMONWEAL, it must be remembered that it has one aim—the propagation of Socialism. We shall not, therefore, make any excuses for what may be thought journalistic shortcomings, if we can but manage to attract attention to the study of our principles from those who have not yet thought of Socialism, or who are, as often happens, bitterly hostile to them through ignorance; or if we can help those whose feelings are drawing them towards the cause of the workers, but who need definite instruction as to its aims and methods. To awaken the sluggish, to strengthen the waverers, to instruct the seekers after truth; these are high aims, yet not too high for a journal that claims to be Socialistic, and we hope by patience and zeal to accomplish them.

It is our duty to attack unsparingly the miserable system which would make all civilisation end in a society of rich and poor, of slaves and slave-owners. In all its details we must attack it; but in doing so we shall avoid mere personalities, not for the sake of escaping the accusations of bad taste and bitterness, which doubtless will in any case be flung at us, but because it is illogical to attack those men, monstrous as their position is, who are themselves mere helpless victims in the terrible machine of modern commerce. To attack such persons, unless they put themselves forward as the representatives of the system, implies the belief that the decency or benevolence of their conduct would usefully palliate the evils of that system; an implication against which we protest from the outset.

THE COMMONWEAL will only deal with political matters when they directly affect the progress of the Cause. We assume as a matter of course; that a government of privileged persons, hereditary and commercial, cannot act usefully or rightly towards the community; their position forbids it; their arrangements for the distribution of the labour of the workers, their struggles for the national share of the product, their exploitation of barbarous peoples are nothing to us except so far as they may give us an opportunity of instilling Socialism into men's minds, or of organizing discontent into Socialism.

We invite from all, Socialists or others, free discussion of anything we put forward, in the belief that even an uninstructed attack will elicit useful information which might otherwise have lain dormant.

Our articles will, for the most part, be of an educational nature: there will be a series on historical revolutions, expositions of the scientific basis of Socialism, and contributions from men of various nationalities.

Lastly, a word of appeal, to the workers chiefly. It is not only that whatever we say is professedly directly in their interest: much more it is through them alone, through the slaves of society, we look for regeneration, for its elevation from its present corruption and degradation. We cannot pretend to think that they, the workers, as yet know much of the principles of the cause that rests upon them, of their own cause, in fact. We beseech them to help us in spreading the knowledge of those principles amongst their fellows, that as we believe they will now find us honest, so their support may make us resolute, patient, and hopeful—in a word, successful in our efforts for the advancement of the cause we have at heart.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

THE MANIFESTO OF THE SOCIALIST LEAGUE

FELLOW CITIZENS,

We come before you as a body advocating the principles of Revolutionary International Socialism; that is, we seek a change in the basis of Society—a change which would destroy the distinctions of classes and nationalities.

As the civilised world is at present constituted, there are two classes of Society—the one possessing wealth and the instruments of its production, the other producing wealth by means of those instruments but only by the leave and for the use of the possessing classes.

These two classes are necessarily in antagonism to one another. The possessing class, or non-producers, can only live as a class on the unpaid labour of the producers—the more unpaid labour they wring out of them, the richer they will be; therefore the producing class—the workers—are driven to strive to better themselves at the expense of the possessing class, and the conflict between the two is ceaseless. Sometimes it takes the form of open rebellion, sometimes of strikes, sometimes of mere widespread mendicancy and crime; but it is always going on in one form or other, though it may not always be obvious to the thoughtless looker-on.

We have spoken of unpaid labour: it is necessary to explain what that means. The sole possession of the producing class is the power of labour inherent in their bodies; but since, as we have already said, the rich classes possess all the instruments of labour, that is, the land, capital, and machinery, the producers or workers are forced to sell their sole possession, the power of labour, on such terms as the possessing class will grant them.

The terms are, that after they have produced enough to keep themselves in working order, and enable them to beget children to take their places when they are worn out, the surplus of their products shall belong to the possessors of property, which bargain is based on the fact that every man working in a civilised community can produce more than he needs for his own sustenance.

The relation of the possessing class to the working class is the essential basis of the system of producing for a profit, on which our modern Society is founded. The way in which it works is as follows: The manufacturer produces to sell at a profit to the broker or factor who in his turn makes a profit out of his dealings with the merchant who again sells for a profit to the retailer, who must make his profit out of the general public, aided by various degrees of fraud and adulteration and the ignorance of the value and quality of goods to which this system has reduced the consumer.

The profit-grinding system is maintained by competition, or veiled war, not only between the conflicting classes, but also within the classes themselves: there is always war among the workers for bare subsistence, and among their masters, the employers and middle-men, for the share of the profit wrung out of the workers; lastly, there is competition always, and sometimes open war, among the nations of the civilised world for their share of the world-market. For any, indeed, all the rivalries of nations have been reduced to this form of struggling for their share of the spoils of barbarous conquest, and used at home for the purpose of increasing the riches of the few and the poverty of the poor.

For, owing to the fact that goods are made primarily to sell, and only secondarily for use, labour is wasted on all hands; since the pursuit of profit compels the manufacturer competing with his fellows to force his wares on the markets by means of their cheapness, whether there is any real demand for them or not. In the words of the Communist Manifesto of 1847:—

“Cheap goods are their artillery for battering down Chinese walls and for overcoming the obstinate hatred entertained against foreign by semi-civilised nations: under penalty of ruin the Bourgeoisie