

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

by competition the universal adoption of their system of production; they force all nations to accept what is called civilisation and become Bourgeois—and thus the middle-class shapes the world in its own image."

Moreover, the whole method of distribution under this system is a waste; for it employs whole armies of clerks, travellers, shopkeepers, advertisers, and what not, merely for the sake of shifting money from one person's pocket to another's; and this waste in production and distribution, added to the maintenance of the useless lives of the possessing and non-producing class, must all be paid for out of the products of the workers, and is a ceaseless burden on their lives.

The necessary results of this so-called civilisation are only too obvious in the lives of its slaves, the working-class—in the anxiety and want of leisure amidst which they toil, in the squalor and overcrowdedness in those parts of our great towns where they dwell; in the degradation of their bodies, their wretched health, and the shortness of their lives; in the terrible brutality so common among them, and which is indeed but the reflection of the cynical selfishness found among the well-to-do classes, a brutality as hideous as the other; and lastly, in the crowd of criminals who are as much manufactures of our commercial system as the cheap and nasty wares which are made at the rate for the consumption and the enslavement of the poor.

What remedy, then, do we propose for this failure of our civilisation, which is now admitted by almost all thoughtful people?

We have already shown that the workers, although they produce the wealth of society, have no control over its production or distribution: the people, who are the only really organic part of society, are treated as a mere appendage to capital—as a part of its machinery. This must be altered from the foundation: the land, the capital, the machinery, factories, workshops, stores, means of transit, mines, banking, all means of production and distribution of wealth, must be declared and treated as the common property of all. Every man will then receive the full value of his labour, without deduction for the profit of a master, and as all will have to work, and the waste now incurred by the pursuit of profit will be at an end, the amount of labour necessary for every individual to produce in order to carry on the essential work of the world will be reduced to something like two or three hours daily; so that every man will have abundant leisure for following intellectual and artistic pursuits congenial to his nature.

The method of production and distribution would be altered so that every man should be able to live decently, and free from the world's anxieties for the rest of his life, in a brotherhood which at present weigh so heavily on the greater part of mankind.

But, moreover, men's social and moral relations would be seriously modified by this gain of economical freedom, and by the collapse of the superstitions, moral and other, which necessarily accompany a state of economical slavery: the test of duty would now rest on the fulfilment of clear and well-defined obligations to the community rather than on the moulding of the individual character and actions to some preconceived standard outside social responsibilities.

Our modern bourgeois property-marriage, maintained as it is by its necessary complement, universal venal prostitution, would give place to friendly and human relations between the sexes.

Education freed from the trammels of commercialism on the one hand and superstition on the other, would become a reasonable drawing out of men's varied faculties in order to fit them for a life of social intercourse and happiness; for mere work would no longer be proposed as the end of life, but happiness for each and all.

Only by such fundamental changes in the life of man, only by the transformation of Civilisation into Socialism, can those miseries of the world before-mentioned be remedied.

As to mere politics, Absolutism, Constitutionalism, Republicanism, have all been tried in our day and under our present social system, and all have alike failed in dealing with the real evils of life.

For, on the other hand, will certain incomplete enemies of social reform now before the public solve the question.

Co-operation so-called—that is, competitive co-operation for profit—would merely increase the number of small joint-stock capitalists, under the mask of creating an aristocracy of labour, while it would intensify the severity of labour by its temptations to overwork.

Nationalisation of the land alone, which many earnest and sincere men are now preaching, would be useless so long as labour was subjected to the fleecing of surplus value inevitable under the Capitalist system.

The latter solution would be that State Socialism, by whatever name it may be called, whose aim it would be to make concessions to the workers while leaving the present system of capital and wages unaltered: no number of merely administrative changes, until

the workers are in possession of all political power, would make a real approach to Socialism.

The Socialist League therefore aims at the realisation of complete Revolutionary Socialism, and well knows that this can never happen in any one country without the help of the workers of all civilisations. For us neither geographical boundaries, political history, race, nor creed makes rivals or enemies; for us there are no nations but only varied masses of workers and friends, whose mutual sympathies are checked or perverted by groups of masters and fleecers who are interested in it to stir up rivalries and hatreds between the dwellers in different lands.

It is clear that for all these oppressed and cheated masses of workers and their masters a great change is preparing: the dominant classes are uneasy, anxious, touched in conscience even, as to the condition of those they govern; the markets of the world are being competed for with an eagerness never before known; everything points to the fact that the great commercial system is becoming unmanageable, and is slipping from the grasp of its present rulers.

The one change possible out of all this is Socialism. As chattel slavery passed into serfdom, and serfdom into the so-called free-labour system, so most surely will this latter pass into social order.

To the realisation of this change the Socialist League addresses itself with all earnestness. As a means thereto it will do all in its power towards the education of the people in the principles of this great cause, and will strive to organise those who will accept this education, so that when the crisis comes, which the march of events is preparing, there may be a body of men ready to step into their due places and deal with and direct the irresistible movement.

Close fellowship with each other, and steady purpose for the advancement of the Cause, will naturally bring about the organisation and discipline amongst ourselves absolutely necessary to success; but we shall look to it that there shall be no distinctions of rank or dignity amongst us to give opportunities for the selfish ambition of leadership which has so often injured the cause of the workers. We are working for equality and brotherhood for all the world, and it is only through equality and brotherhood that we can make our work effective.

Let us all strive, then, towards this end of realising the cause towards social order, the only cause worthy the attention of the workers of all that are proffered to them: let us work in that cause patiently, yet hopefully, and not shrink from making sacrifices to Industry in learning its principles, industry in teaching them, are most necessary to our progress; but to these we must add, if we wish to avoid speedy failure, frankness and fraternal trust in each other, and single-hearted devotion to the religion of Socialism, the only religion which the Socialist League professes.

Signatures of the Provisional Council of the Socialist League.

W. B. ADAMS.
EDWARD AVELING.
ELLENOR GARY AVERY.
ROBERT BANNER.
E. BELFORD BAX.
THOMAS BINNING.
H. CHARLES.
WILLIAM J. CLARK.
J. COOPER.
E. T. CRAIG.
CHARLES J. FAULKNER.
W. HUDSON.
FRANK KITZ.
JOSEPH LANE.
FREDERIC LESSNER.
THOMAS MAGUIRE (Leeds).
J. L. MAHON.
S. MAINWARING.
JAMES MAJOR (Glasgow).
WILLIAM MORRIS.
C. MOWBRAY.
ANDREAS SCHEU (Edinburgh).
EDWARD WATSON.

IMPERIALISM v. SOCIALISM.

WE seem at the present time to have arrived at the acute stage of the colonial fever which during the past three or four years has afflicted the various powers of Europe. Germany is vying with France, England with both, in the haste to seize upon "unoccupied" countries and to establish "protectorates"—the cant diplomatic for inconclusive annexation—over uncivilised peoples. "The rivalry among the nations for their share of the world market" (to quote the words of our *festi*) must now, one would think, have discovered itself to the casual newspaper reader as the only meaning the "diplomacy" and "foreign policy" any longer possess. The jealousy between the courts of Europe, once the sole and recently the main cause of national enmity and war, has in our day been superseded by the jealousy between the great capitalist powers of various nationalities. The flunkey-patriot, zealous of his country's honour, dances as readily to-day to the pipe of capitalist greed as he did before to that of royal intrigue, let it but sound the note of national hatred. In both cases he makes the running for the