

# THE COMMONWEAL

The Official Journal of the Socialist League.

Vol. 1.—No. 6.

JULY, 1885.

ONE PENNY.

## CONTENTS.

	PAGE
Notes on the Political Crisis ... ..	53
The Factory Inferno ... ..	54
East-End Workers ... ..	55
Socialists at Play ... ..	56
Capital, Surplus-Value and Labour Power ... ..	57
A Glorious Liberal Government... ..	58
Correspondence ... ..	58
Inquiry Column ... ..	58
Record of International Movement ... ..	59
The Police Outrage at the International Club ... ..	59
Socialist League General Meeting ... ..	59
Reports, Lecture Diary, etc. ... ..	60
Socialism and Politics ... ..	61
The Work Before Us ... ..	61
Socialism of the Tea-Table ... ..	62
A New Marseillaise ... ..	63
Review—Woman in the Past, Present and Future ... ..	63

## NOTES ON THE POLITICAL CRISIS.

THE past fortnight has been fertile in surprises. By something as sudden as the stroke of Harlequin's wand, the Gladstone Ministry found itself resigning as the consequence of a defeat which was the result of "accident," say the Liberal leaders, with so much solemnity that it would be uncivil to doubt them. Yet when one considers that they were pledged to bring in a Coercion bill, which the Radical wing were pledged to oppose (though, indeed, they would pretty certainly have broken that pledge), one can't help thinking that if it was not an accident carefully provided for, it was an accident that resulted from a sudden flash of inspiration on the part of the leaders, who saw on the night of the debate what could be made of the turn which things were taking. By such inspirations do great generals win battles, and usually they are not so modest as to call them accidents afterwards.

The trap, though thus laid in the sight of the bird, was entered with apparent willingness. But then comes another surprise. The Tory leaders, who surely might have taken it for granted that they would have to be at least as kind to their enemies as to their friends, seemed to think it worth trying whether they could not have a Session without any enemies at all; or, perhaps, as their heads cleared from the intoxication of their triumph, they began to see that they might, in turn, put their opponents in a more or less awkward position, which would tend to discredit them before the new electorate. Hence has resulted a curious game of some interest to those who are fond of watching the domestic game of "Patience"; of no interest otherwise, except so far as it may discredit both parties before all sensible people.

But where are the "sensible people"? Scattered thinly, I fear, among the general population. Yet, if they would only unite, they would move the world.

Meanwhile Mr. Gladstone, having threatened more than once to retire altogether, has had his hand forced by the offer of the gilded shelf of an earldom, and has declined it, to the great jubilation of the semi-radical Liberals, who, probably with reason, see in his refusal a token of his sticking to his post of leader, even when this "crisis" is over.

Sir Stafford Northcote, on the other hand, has been shoved on to the shelf willy nilly—an incident of little significance even in the insignificant game of politics.

Except that it betokens that, whatever other results the "Political Crisis" may have, it will at any rate have put Lord Randolph Churchill in the place he has been playing for—the virtual leadership of the Tory party. Time will show what

he will do there. It may turn out that his cleverness is only that of the ordinary Parliamentary trickster, and that he will simply kick down the ladder by which he has mounted, according to the rule in such cases; or he may show the higher qualities of the gamester, and be original enough to stick to his text of Tory Democracy, in which case he may lead his party into some queer places, out of which it is possible that the worker may win some advantage.

Nervousness about the consequences of action on the results of the General Election seems to have weighed much on the possible office-holders. For instance—a small instance: Sir M. Hicks Beach, tackled by temperance societies as to his utterance in the Budget debate championing the licensed victuallers by favouring a tax on tea and sugar rather than spirits and beer, is driven to a reply which recalls Mrs. Wilfer to us; for he says, in fact, that when he advocated the said taxes, he did so with the reservation that he didn't mean it in any sense whatever.

Again, as to the coercion for Ireland. At first it was asserted (or assumed) that Lord Salisbury would only take office on the understanding that the Liberal leaders would pledge themselves and their party to help in passing that aid to "the reign of order" in Ireland. But again, the *Standard* indignantly proclaims that there is no foundation for this assertion. Indeed, the Tory Ministry would be in a tight place here; for surely their passing a Coercion Bill would mean their giving up all hope at the general election.

The imaginative man is almost driven to suppose that this surrender and acceptance of office is a sham battle on both sides—a tacit plot of Whig, Tory, Liberal, Radical, in view of the general election, to let coercion slide with a certain amount of dignity. If so, it is a curious illustration of the proverb—When rogues fall out honest men prosper.

Mr. Chamberlain seems inclined to pronounce in favour of Home Rule, and condemns the Castle Government unsparingly, whatever his opinion once was. After all, we are getting on, along some lines at least. Or will there be a fresh reaction after the general election, when it turns out that the new Parliament is composed of much the same elements as the old?

The *Times* calls on Lord Salisbury to make alliance with the moderate Whigs rather than with the Tory democrats. A writer in the *Pall Mall* follows suit, and has a vision of a "patriotic" party of the future. It is clearly quite impossible for Lord Salisbury to follow this advice at present; but perhaps such a coalition will one day take place, and will produce a party not only reactionary, but of such portentous priggishness and stupidity, that it will be of great service to the cause of the people.

And now at last the crisis is over, and Lord Randolph Churchill and his cloak, Lord Salisbury, are "masters" of the parliamentary hubbub. Nor need anybody sleep the worse for it to-night, not even the editor of the *Pall Mall*, although he threatens dreadful things, the Russian ambassador, for instance, leaving London unless he gets an explanation of the language used by Lord Salisbury and Lord Randolph. Well, well, he will have the explanations, I suppose, and will stay.

And Mr. Chamberlain and Sir Charles Dilke, longer sighted than some, are going to Ireland to get used to the atmosphere of Nationalism—or to try and outflank Mr. Parnell. Who would have thought it four years ago? Not I, who heard a Radical meeting yelling with joy at the announcement of the

arrest of Mr. Parnell by the Government of which the two allies were members. So the world moves.

If in the foregoing notes the subject of this crisis seems to be treated with levity, I can only say that it is almost impossible to speak seriously about such contemptible trifling, which is unparalleled by anything save the Court changes in the worst periods of the Byzantine Empire. If only people could see how contemptible it is, and so duly estimate the worth of Parliament.

One thing, of course, it points to—the break-up and confusion of all the old parties. There is hope in that, at any rate. Futile as the new Parliamentary parties will certainly be, they will not be so long-lived as the old, consolidated as these have been by tradition and long habits of attack and defence. Doubt, irresolution, and waiting to see which way the cat jumps will be for a long time the characteristics of the new parties, under which, condemned by all “respectabilities,” the revolution will form, and at last, when it gets strong enough, will drive all parties which are not of it to consolidate into one party of open conscious reaction. May we all live to see the day which will bring that about!

WILLIAM MORRIS.

## THE FACTORY INFERNO.

MR. REDGRAVE, chief inspector of factories, has recently issued his report for 1884. The student of its predecessors will be pained, but not surprised, to find that this latest report is miserably like all its fore-runners. The same callous indifference to human suffering and to human life; the same kinds of diseases affecting the workers but never the masters; the same crowd of preventable accidents; the same prosecutions of employers for breach of the acts, with acquittals or wholly inadequate sentences; the same unholy alliance between masters and magistrates.

The sanitation question in all its aspects is vexing the minds of the inspectors almost as much as in the earlier years of the working of the Acts. The difficulties of so much of the question as refers to ventilation are made greater by the susceptibility, partly real, partly imaginary, of the workers to cold draughts of air. I say “partly imaginary,” because the English working classes are almost as antagonistic to fresh air as a German in a railway carriage. They do not understand its value, and they over-estimate its likelihood of doing harm. If the grinding toil in which they exist left them time to study a little elementary physiology, they would know that a thousand times more injury is likely to result from a close room than from one with a little draught in it. Whilst, however, the prejudice against the slightest trace of draught is, I think, absurd, it must not be forgotten that the physical strength of the class as a whole, and of certain individuals, has been undermined, and there is an over-susceptibility to chest affections.

The inspectors who visited the London millinery and dress-making shops, report “that in comparatively few places are any special means taken to secure adequate ventilation.” Some of the details given in regard to the East-end sweaters’ establishments are painfully interesting. Visits were made to 1478 shops. 724 were not under inspection at all, and 387 were not within the control of the inspectors as far as sanitary measures were concerned. In 907 of these 1111, alterations were required. In 132 of the 367 wholly under supervision, alterations were required. Here are one or two cases.

“No trap to sink. Drinking water from cistern not covered over. Filthy heap of refuse: no proper dust-bin. Water supply to W.C. (from same cistern) out of order. Three families in this house.

“Very dirty place. Place strewn with filthy rags and bones. No drain. W.C. the receptacle for refuse.

“Overcrowded. Drinking water and W.C. supply connected. Tap for drawing drinking water is in the W.C.

“W.C. almost inside workroom. No water supply, except in basement not accessible to tenants. No dust-bin. Condition of drinking water complained of. All houses on this side of street supplied from one cistern at No. 18.”

The modern system of production drags in its train diseases that affect the workers only, and not the exploiters. Only three are mentioned in this report: those of the wool-sorters, the millers, the file-cutters. In Bradford the wool-sorters’ disease is so frequent that a code of regulations has been drawn up for the workshops that reads like the directions one sees posted in a hospital for some virulent disease. But the carrying out of these regulations is voluntary, and every worker knows what that means.

Upon the subject of millers’ asthma the report runs thus:

“It is quite exceptional to see a person who has worked any time in a flour mill who is not more or less affected as to the respiratory organs. The average life of millers is stated to be only forty-five years.”

Flour-mills are not under the Acts. Here is one out of many piteous cries to the inspectors:

“Sir,—If it comes within your duties under the Factory Act to protect men obliged to work for sixteen to twenty-one hours per day, I shall ask you to look up some of the flour-mills in this town. Health is sacrificed for the sake of holding bad situations.—Yours,  
Hoping for help.

January 28, 1884.”

The file-cutters suffer from lead-poisoning. One symptom of this affection is the drooping of the wrists and the weakening of the thumbs. An increase in the number of cases presenting these particular phases of lead-poisoning has been observed of late. This increase is due to the increased strain and jar on the muscles caused by the greater hardness of the steel used in making files.

“A hammer 7lbs. weight is required to do the work at the present time which twenty-five years ago could be done with one 5lbs. weight.”

This is another instance of the way in which advances in manufacturing industry tell against, and not for, the workers.

In 1884 there were 403 fatal accidents that came under the notice of the inspectors; 1,337 cases of amputation of a limb; 830 fractured limbs; 981 injuries to head and face; 5,413 lacerations, contusions and the like; in all, 8,964. If to these reported and recorded cases are added in imagination the large number of accidents that never come under the notice of the officials, it will be seen that England does pretty ill in the way of maiming its workers.

The larger number of these are preventable, and would be prevented if the employers were not blinded with their wild race for wealth. The two chief causes of them are the non-fencing of machinery and the cleaning of machinery in motion. The former is clearly the fault of the masters only. The latter is due to the habitual payment of piece-wages. This habit begets in the workmen, women, and children a feverish anxiety not to lose a moment even if the attendant risk be the loss of a limb. With regard to the fencing difficulty I quote one case only:

“With your consent, I lately prosecuted an important company for having neglected to fence certain mill-gearing. A poor girl had been told to remove dust in brick-works at a spot (as the manager stated) 8 feet from an unfenced shaft and cogged wheels. She was not on that day cautioned not to approach the shaft where most of the dust was to be found. Her clothing was caught by the shaft: she was gradually dragged into the wheels. Both legs were cut off and one arm broken. She died the same day.

“At the hearing of my case, an engine-wright (who stated that he had been in charge of the machinery for seven years) said that he had not thought a guard necessary, and, although a girl had been killed, he was still of the same opinion.

“The chairman of the company prosecuted would, I am convinced, have acted generously to the relations of deceased had he not conscientiously believed that his managers had taken all reasonable precaution, and that a dangerous precedent would have been established by admitting blame.”

On the cleaning of machinery in motion Inspector Coles writes:

“I am sorry to see that the number of accidents, especially in textile factories, has increased very much of late. The truth is, that nearly one half of the accidents which take place arise from women and young persons cleaning the machinery when it is in motion. In some mills, however, I am afraid scarcely sufficient time is allowed for cleaning the machinery when stopped, though in many cases the fault lies with the work-people themselves, who, being on piece-work, are reluctant to lose any time by stopping the machinery.”

Quarries, in which very frequent and very terrible accidents occur, are not under the Acts. As to the ship-building yards the only accidents that need be reported in any are the fatal ones, and wherever only men are employed and no mechanical power is used not even fatal accidents need be reported and the inspectors have actually no jurisdiction at all.

I cannot refrain from quoting, ere I leave the subject of accidents, one case that is tragically interesting in view of the lethargy of masters in this connexion.

“I had twice told him verbally that he must fence an upright shaft, running through the first-floor room from floor to ceiling. Finally I sent him an order to fence at once. He always assured me that there was no danger to be apprehended from it whatever, and that it had been running so for years. He neglected to comply with the order sent, and shortly afterwards was himself killed through the shaft obtaining a hold on his overcoat as he was standing near it.”

From the list of prosecutions of employers for infringing the Acts, one or two old, old truths came out again. The cases of