

# THE COMMONWEAL

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## NOTES ON PASSING EVENTS.

MICHAEL SCHWAB, Samuel Fielden, Albert Parsons, Adolph Fischer, George Engel, and Louis Lingg have been condemned to death, and Oscar Neebe (probably more unfortunate than the others) to imprisonment for fifteen years. If they had anything to do with throwing the bomb, Society will not attempt to justify itself for slaying these men, but will consider that it has done well. But, as was said in these columns when the news of the conflict first came, whatever had taken place before the meeting, at that meeting itself it was a matter of battle, and the men were defending their lives as all soldiers must; and truly revolutionary soldiers do always fight with a rope round their necks. For the rest no thoughtful and honest man, whether he be Socialist or not, who has ever considered the nature of a "White Terror," the shopkeeper in terror for his shop, will doubt that it was impossible that these men should have a fair trial. We do not need the evidence of Wm. Holmes's very interesting and useful letters as given in our last and present issues, to show us that victims were needed, and would be found whatever the evidence might be. To American respectability all Socialists are Anarchists, and all Anarchists are bomb-throwers to be so treated whenever the opportunity shall occur.

The following paragraph is sufficiently significant of what is going on in America in this matter: "It is understood that the Chicago authorities contemplate the immediate arrest of all persons even indirectly connected with the May riot on the charge of conspiracy." "Indirectly connected" may stretch widely enough to include any one who has said a word against the system of robbery on which "Society" rests in America, as elsewhere; or who, if it must be so, and when the assent of the real Society, the Society of the producers, becomes general, is prepared to use what force may be necessary; though he may lament isolated outbreaks like the Chicago affair; for such outbreaks irritate "Society" without shaking it, and are aimless as long as the mass of the workers have not learned to understand their true position.

Some of the correspondents of the bourgeois papers state the verdict and sentence against the Anarchists was received with cheers. It is to be hoped for the credit of human nature that this is a journalist's lie, founded on the bitterness of capitalistic society against those who have attacked it openly. It would be difficult to find words to express one's disgust at the baseness of people who live at ease on the labour of others, exulting over the condemnation of their fellow-men to an ignominious death.

"A fair trial" quotha! Well, I mean a *legally* fair trial. After having been an ear-and-eye witness of our own small experience in trials (a comedy, or rather farce, as set beside the Chicago tragedy), I must conclude that under the law of a Society founded on robbery sustained by violence, as ours is, a fair trial is impossible. The maxim, apparently uncontradicted, that the event which is being judged must be isolated as to both time and place from all surrounding circumstances makes the whole thing absurd. So acting, you set out from the first with the determination of not getting at the real facts of the case. All you *can* know about it on such terms are certain formal facts, illumined perhaps by a word or two which has dropped from an eager witness before the judge has had time to stop him; and which the judge takes care to tell the jury they must not consider as evidence, as though they could possibly help doing so when they have once heard it.

Take for example our own case, *The Queen v. Williams and Mainwaring*. In the minds of all people who have interested themselves in the street-corner preaching the chief point was and is whether the police had made an unfair difference between the Socialists and the religious and other bodies. If it could be shown that they had been doing so, then, apart from the duties which the "Religion of Socialism" imposes on us as Socialists, in the eyes of all ordinary persons of any good will the defendants would have been public-spirited persons resisting the injurious misapplication of a very stretchable law. If on the contrary it could have been shown (as it couldn't) that the police had made no difference between the Socialists and other bodies, then to the general public the defendants were acting as rebels against a law presumably made for ensuring the convenience of the whole public, and the case would have been on quite a different footing. But any evidence that tended towards showing the facts on this point was

rigidly excluded by the judge; and we have to appeal from a so-called "court of justice" to the press or other extra-judicial means of publicity.

Parliament has met again to give the Ministry an opportunity of declaring their policy, and to transact a little "business." The "policy" is just what might have been expected—an attempt to live by doing nothing. Lord Randolph Churchill put down his foot on any concession being made in the eviction war, as he was bound to do. "Her Majesty's troops" are to act as they have acted, as bum-bailiffs—an occupation entirely suitable to them, but somewhat expensive to the tax-payers at home; who, however, deserve a great deal more than they will get for their behaviour in the late elections. Meantime the evictions now going on in Galway are a sufficient commentary on the speech of this champion of the landlords and Tory Democracy.

However, the little game now being played in Bulgaria, news of which is lately to hand, will no doubt afford the Ministry a welcome opportunity for a diversion from the home matters which press upon them, since they will be able to get up another Russian scare, not without some foundation. This will be easy to them, but it will not be easy to carry on a war with a great European power, if they should drift into that. Doubtless this consideration does not trouble them.

"A good deal is heard about gambling on the Stock Exchange, but there is reason to believe that the amount of gambling which goes on under the guise of legitimate trade is often more wild and excessive still. The public do not follow so closely the dealings in produce, iron, etc., as in securities, and therefore, on the principle *omne ignotum pro mirabile*, ordinary observers are apt to believe that dealings in Mark Lane, Mincing Lane, and the Baltic, are of a superior tone and morality to those which go on in the Stock Exchange. The following incident, however, rather disturbs this complaisant view of the state of British trade. In the Baltic this afternoon it was stated that wheat and linseed for shipment from Calcutta in April to June next year have been already sold; and as these articles are hardly yet even sown—if, indeed, either buyer or seller concerns himself in the least about their existence, present or future—the operation may be stigmatised as gambling of the most shameless description."—*Daily News*, August 21.

No comment is needed on the above.

"POLICE AND OPEN-AIR PREACHING.—Dear Sir,—The police have been trying to put down our Saturday evening open-air services, and have now given notice of their intention to summon us. We conduct the services on our own property, fronting the main thoroughfare in the parish. The prosecution is to be under some old statute which they say they have discovered. Amongst your many readers there may be legal gentlemen skilled in this question, who would be only too glad to help us in our struggle to preach the gospel of Christ, as our Master did, in the open air. The question is an important one, for if the police were successful it would give them a decision which might prove a dangerous precedent in all future evangelistic effort.—Yours truly, Wm. Adamson, vicar. The Vicarage, Old Ford, E."

The above letter, addressed to the *Christian*, shows that the police are trying to put a good face on their difficulty by attacking other bodies besides the Socialists; and they will doubtless try to convince the public that they have always done so. Comrades should all the more make careful notes as to such meetings and the amount of complaisance with which they are treated by the police. WILLIAM MORRIS.

## CAPITALISTIC ADVANTAGES OF VEGETARIANISM.

THE vegetarian capitalists have just issued their circular, setting forth the advantages to be derived, both morally and monetarily, from a vegetarian diet. The circular opens with the following explanation:

"The four primary essentials of healthy bodily existence are Light, Air, Water, and Food. The first three of these we enjoy without any effort on our part" [The devil we can!]; "but the fourth cannot be obtained without labour. The effort required, however, to derive our food direct from the soil is light and pleasant, and, the best of all, bodily exercise. Three hours a day devoted to the preparation of the soil and the cultivation of its products, is amply sufficient to provide any one with abundance of nourishing diet. So perverted, however, has human existence become, that most people are toiling from early morn till dark in one unceasing, worrying struggle to obtain for themselves and families the necessaries of life. Millions of them are dragging out a miserable existence, scarcely able to procure sufficient food to keep body and soul together."

Socialists are often sneered at when they affirm that three hours' work per day would be ample to supply all that a man needs to keep him in vigorous health; therefore, I am thankful to the vegetarian capitalist for his help in this direction. After the above paragraph,