

## A LETTER FROM THE PACIFIC COAST.

WE have received an interesting letter from San Francisco relative to the labour question and especially to the conference lately held there, in which the main subject of discussion was the Chinese labour question. Our correspondent's letter is as follows:

"1035 Post Street, S. F., California, Dec. 9, '85.

"DEAR COMRADES,—We last night adjourned from the 'Trades and Labour Organisations Convention' which had, with an interval of two days, been sitting since last Monday week. A full report is in course of preparation, of which you will undoubtedly receive a copy, but this is not yet ready, and I am anxious that you should receive at least an outline of the proceedings in time for your January issue. I am sending you copies of the *Daily Report* which, though a capitalistic paper, has given the gist of the speeches with commendable fairness. A study of such copies will give you a general idea of the work and temper of the convention, but it may be useful to English readers if I add the following as explanatory notes.

"In the first place we consider that we have gained a most decisive victory over the politicians, who have hitherto been the curse of the labour movement in this city. They, having obtained control of the District Assembly of the Knights of Labour, appointed themselves an Executive Board, and summoned the convention. They originally intended to run it as a political convention, and for that purpose threw out the credentials of the Socialist organisations. The convention by an overwhelming vote defeated them in this, and, if you will note that the names I have underlined are those of the Socialists, you will see what a significant part we played.

"The line we have taken throughout is briefly this. We have leaned greatly on the Declaration of Independence, which declares this to be a government of and for the people, and that all are entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I may, perhaps, say here that I feel now convinced that this is invariably safe ground to take with an American audience. We accordingly declared that, the will of the people on this coast having most unequivocally declared for the expulsion of the Chinese, the people were bound to be true to themselves, and to enforce compliance with their demand. Everyone, however, of our speakers declared (and we had the ear of the audience throughout) that the Chinaman was our brother-slave; that we had no quarrel with him, and that not one drop of his blood must be shed; that the crime lay with the property owners, the employers who make profit out of the Chinese, and the officials who refused to execute the demands of the people. These we recommended as personally responsible. We adopted the same line of personal responsibility of officials to the people in our handling of the Convict Labour and Hard Times questions, in which last, of course, we got in plenty of work, every speaker being distinctly Socialistic, and an audience of some 1500 having the whole question laid before them in the clearest and most thorough manner.

"Having had for six nights an audience of 1500 to 2000 people, we have, I believe, conclusively shown that we Socialists are the power in the labour movement on this coast, and we have for the first time got the Trades Unions, who are now in course of federation, in sympathy with us. This I consider an incalculable gain.

"I may add that a careful study of the proceedings, and of the audience—which was throughout a most orderly and intelligent one—has convinced me that the people are far more advanced than I for one had imagined. The feeling against the wealthy and the police is, I am also certain, intensely strong. It has, however, modified my judgment on the Chinese question; for I have honestly held the belief that there would be this winter at least an attempt to drive the Chinese out of this city by force, and have further considered it a sacred duty incumbent on us to make at least an attempt to direct the storm against those who deserve that it should fall upon them. I now incline to the opinion that there are large masses who recognise that the cause of hard times lies far deeper than the Chinaman, and that they will wait till they can settle this question upon broader and sounder principles. If we have accomplished this we have, as I am sure all English comrades will admit, done good work."

This on the whole is satisfactory and reassuring, especially considering the sinister rumour of a plot for the massacre of the Chinese which was published in the English press some weeks ago, and which now appears from information since received from America to have been one of the breed of plots instigated by the police for the benefit of the capitalists. Our correspondent being present at the Convention would have a much more accurate impression of its tendency than any newspaper report could give, as he would understand the significance of what was said there in comparison with the utterances of former times.

Nevertheless, if anything can be said on this side of the Atlantic which might strengthen the hands of the American Socialists in pointing out to the workers their real enemy, it ought to be said; so as an International Revolutionary Socialist, I venture to make a few remarks, premising for the information of our English friends that a law has been passed restricting the importation of Chinese labour (apparently made that it might not be carried out) and that this law is systematically disregarded by the capitalist officials, so that our American friends are only exercising their ordinary rights as citizens in calling on the government to see that the law is carried out. It must also be remembered that whereas the European immigrants, Irish, German, or Scandinavian, speedily mingle with the general population, and so do not affect the standard of livelihood permanently by the lower standard which they bring over with them, the Chinese do no such thing, but remain Chinese in America, a community within a community.

Now I must say that it would be difficult to exaggerate the crime of the capitalists in their importation of Chinese labour; done as it was for profit, quite regardless of the welfare of either Chinese or American workmen. I fear, indeed, that some of the individuals of that order (of capitalists) who were engaged in the transaction, would give an ugly grin at the weakness of anybody supposing that they could think of anyone's welfare except their own and their families'. But the preamble of the resolution passed at the Convention pointed out very truly that the expulsion of the Chinese would by no means solve the labour question in America, and if our comrades there can only drive that home hard enough, so that American workmen can really understand it even amidst the sufferings caused by the immediate and special attack on their standard of livelihood, then the labour question in America will have entered into a new phase.

For this crime is being committed everywhere and always in civilisa-

tion by Capital; nor can it help committing the crime as long as it exists. Neither preaching nor terrorism will make it refrain from this: it is not an accident, but an essential condition of its life to drive down wages to the lowest point possible. Foiled in one direction it will try it in another, and will in the long run always succeed as long as it has life in it.

The Chinese workmen are only doing what every workman is *forced* to do more or less, that is to compete with his fellows for subsistence. It is true that the Chinese are *forced* by capital into being more obviously the enemies of their fellow-workmen than is usually the case, but that is only a surface difference; it is more dramatic, that is all. Every working-man is *forced* into the same false position of contest with every other working-man until he becomes a Socialist, and is conscious of his being naturally the *friend* of every workman throughout the world, and until he does his best to realise the consequences that should flow from this friendship.

The Chinese workmen are no more guilty of the suffering which their competition causes than are the women and girls who in London are starving the male adult tailors; are being *used* to starve them one should say—used against their own husbands, brothers and sweethearts.

It would be miserable indeed in this Chinese matter if, as too often happens, the instruments should receive the suffering due to those who have used them; who indeed in their turn are but the instruments of the long centuries of oppression which we may surely hope are now drawing to a close. If the American workmen can see this, and abstain, as we may well hope they will, from playing into the hands of their real enemies by attacking their fellow wage-slaves the Chinese, they will deserve well of the Brotherhood of labour, and will show that they understand the motto: WAGE-WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES UNITE!

WILLIAM MORRIS.

## THE LIBERTY AND PROPERTY DEFENCE LEAGUE.

REPORT FOR 1885.

JUDGING from the report of the doings of the band of landlords, lawyers, publicans, pawnbrokers and lesser banditti, who comprise the bulk of the aforesaid society, it seems to me a more appropriate title would be The Liberty to Plunder Protection League. One of the objects of this precious association is to resist over-legislation, and a list of about 40 Bills is given which the L. P. D. L. helped either to reject or mutilate during the past year. Amongst these were Bills relating to the London Livery Companies; Housing of the Working Classes; Labourers (Ireland); Suspension of Evictions (Scotland); Land Tenure (Scot.); Access to Mountains (Scot.); Factory Acts (Extension to Shops); Employers Liability Amendment; Criminal Law Amendment; and a number dealing with the drink traffic, railways, water companies, etc. By a curious coincidence it would seem that over-legislation commences precisely at the point where Government ceases to be merely a machine for the plunder and oppression of the many for the benefit of the few, and begins to touch, even in the most gingerly fashion, the sacred privileges of property. These hypocrites prate of liberty, and yet use the forces of the state which we workers pay for, to evict our Irish and Scottish brethren and to awe our fellow wage-slaves into submission to their taskmasters. A significant item in the report refers to a banquet given by the Pawnbrokers' Defence Association to the members of the League's Parliamentary Committee "as a mark of appreciation of the assistance rendered by the League in the successful opposition to the Pawnbroker's Bill and the Stolen Goods Bill in the preceding session." Truly a notable illustration of the old saying, "Birds of a feather etc.," this feast of the kites and the crows! But what of the poor wretches fleeced by the landlords and their allies—the "poor man's bankers," as the report euphemistically terms those traders in human misery, the pawnbrokers!

A lengthy paragraph is devoted to the action of the League in relation to the International Club affair. This is the only matter in which the League was concerned in which self-interest was not manifestly the sole ruling motive. The assistance of the League was doubtless asked more in irony than anything else. The astute individuals who run the concern, however, took up the case as a means of getting a little cheap popularity by posing as champions of liberty; and so the chairman of the committee wrote a letter to the papers appealing for subscriptions, a little political humbugging took place, and the upshot was, in the words of the report, that "the members of the club were ultimately compelled from lack of means to forego the prosecution, which on public and private grounds it was most desirable should have been pressed home." Yet be it noted that three of these Defenders of Liberty, whose names appear on the report as members of the Parliamentary Committee—viz., Earls Fortescue, Pembroke (Ireland's richest landlord), and Wemyss, possess respectively rentals of £28,674, £50,233, and £57,567; whilst the aggregate rental of half-a-dozen of the rank and file, reaches the enormous sum of £450,334. Amongst the titled founders of the League is also to be found the name of Lord Leconfield who owns 110,725 acres of land, with a rental of £88,482. He is a non-resident landlord of County Clare, and a portion of his enormous income is thus derived from the robbery of probably the most poverty-stricken peasantry on the face of the earth. In addition to the black mail levied in the form of rent, these objectors to over-legislation and their families, have plundered the public treasury of several millions in the form of pensions, etc., during the last 30 years. Money can generally be got for debauching pot-house politicians with cheap whisky and tobacco, and for the hire of "bravoes" to support the cause of the exploiters; but where the interests of the "common people" only were concerned, even such a "noble" society as the L. P. D. L., brimming over with love of liberty and the working man, was unable to find the means for their defence.

It appears grimly grotesque to read, notwithstanding that 274 lectures were given at workmen's clubs by the League agents. Bill Sykes on "The Benefits of Burglary," or Charley Bates proffering "A Plea for Pocket-picking," seems to me a far less ridiculous notion than that of a body of working men gravely listening to a lecture on "Progress or Plunder" and the dangers of Socialism, from the point of view of the audacious monopolists who constitute the Liberty and Property Defence League. It is to be hoped that the report will be read and pondered in every workman's Club, in order that the wiles of these wolves may be understood, who hunt in packs themselves and preach individualism to the sheep in order that they may more easily devour them.

T. B.