

# THE COMMONWEAL

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ONE PENNY.

## OUR POLICY.

THE recent "disturbances" as the word goes, the stir in the dry bones of labour, is a strange phenomenon to most people, and even to us, who have been working towards a change in the basis of Society, is unexpected; amidst the routine of our ordinary educational work we have been surprised, as it were, by something which, whatever else may be said of it, does look like the first skirmish of the Revolution.

The riot, or whatever it may be called, of February 8th, though a small matter in itself, became of importance because it has got to be a fixed idea in the heads of—well—most men, men of all classes, that the English workman had at last been brought to the point of incapacity of expressing his grievances by anything more threatening than an election riot; which expressed nothing at all except a certain pleasure in a "rough and tumble," joined perhaps to the irritation which comes of the indigestion of the "lower classes," an indigestion bred of garbage-eating, and want of fresh air and leisure.

But here was a crowd composed in the main, in spite of the watch-stealing, which was the work of professional thieves on the look out for plunder, of genuine working-men, who were angry, or excited, or miserable enough to cast off their habitual fear of consequences for an hour or two, and indulge in a threat to the Society which had made them the lower classes; as to the details of that threat I will not say much. I have no doubt that the shoeing-horn to the riot was the "truly gentlemanly" behaviour of the fools at the Carlton Club, who took for granted the axiom above stated, that a crowd of the English "lower classes" will stand anything, and throw jeers and milk-cans at them accordingly. However, let that pass. Apart from what actual plunder there was, the wrecking of shops to carry the contents away, the proceedings of the crowd seemed like a sort of gigantic practical joke against the tyrant—Sham Society. A joke mingled with threatening, embittered by anger and contempt; characterised by the English tendency towards brutality masked by good humour, which is so apt amongst our countrymen to accompany the first stages of a great tragedy. These seem to me to have been the outward aspects of this strange, and, in spite of all drawbacks, most memorable scene.

What was the meaning of it? At bottom misery, illuminated by a faint glimmer of hope, raised by the magic word SOCIALISM, the only hope of these days of confusion. That was what the crowd represented, whatever other elements were mingled with it.

What has come of it? The first outcome was on the Tuesday and Wednesday following, a panic at first sight quite inexplicable. There were no mobs in the streets, no placards threatening revolution, no processions—"no nothing" in short,—and the respectabilities were terribly afraid. Such abject cowardice has perhaps seldom been so frankly shown as was shown by the middling bourgeoisie on those two days. Whatever were they afraid of? Of nothing? No; they were afraid of their own position, so suddenly revealed to them as by a flash of lightning; their position as a class dominating a class injured by them, and more numerous than they. No doubt this insight into the depths of Society will be of service to the dominated class; who will also remember the terror it caused, after their masters have forgotten it.

As another result: the money which was coming into the Mansion House Fund very slowly, is now coming in in sacksful. I would wish to be as fair as possible to the richer classes; and I must say, therefore, that I think this comes partly from people's consciences being touched by the distress now at last become visible to them; yet partly also, I think, from fear. "Let us show them how kind we are, it may keep them quiet!"

What will come from these "disturbances"? First, some palliative measures. That is the regular course of events in England of late years; every reform has been blindly resisted till obvious violence has been brought to bear upon the question. Witness the Irish "difficulty," which has made great steps since I heard John Morley in St. James's Hall, before the Westminster electors in 1880, declare that Home Rule was a subject inadmissible of discussion. Well, furthermore, these palliatives must necessarily take the form of an interference with the sanctity of the labour market; an artificial raising of wages by authority, which in its turn will be a spoke in the wheel of our commercial system, will hasten its disruption, in other words, will tend to bring on Revolution.

Another thing may happen, at first sight very unpleasant to us of the Socialist League. We may be suppressed; practically at least, if not formally. It is true that just now cool-headed people of the middle-classes rather smile at the ravings of the *Telegraph*. And yet I think

that those ravings are prophetic. Already something or other, probably the Leicester strike riots, has forced the government to turn back on its resolution of letting the speakers at the Demonstration alone, and they are now on their trial.

Well, what will be the result of that attempt at the suppression of opinion? Of course, opinion cannot be suppressed; we shall find means of disseminating our opinions; but repressive interference with us will make those opinions a kind of mystery, a thing to conjure with. The upper classes will, of course, look upon that mystery as a hateful but also a fearful thing; on the other hand the lower classes will be eager to know what this Socialism is, which professes to be altogether in their interest, and which the upper classes think so dangerous that no man must know anything about it if it can be helped. Repression will attract the working-classes to us. Opinion which must be suppressed is Revolutionary; under such conditions fear and hope are abroad, the mere dramatic situation forces people into enquiry, action is dreaded and is hoped for; the Socialist Party will become a political force when all these things happen.

Now I should like to say a few words with the utmost seriousness to our comrades and supporters, on the policy of the Socialist League. I have said that we have been overtaken unprepared, by a revolutionary incident, but that incident was practically aimless. This kind of thing is what many of us have dreaded from the first, and we may be sure that it will happen again and again while the industrial outlook is what it is; but every time it happens it will happen with ever-increasing tragedy. It is above all things our business to guard against the possible consequences of these surprises. At the risk of being misunderstood by hot-heads, I say that our business is more than ever *Education*.

The Gospel of Discontent is in a fair way towards forcing itself on the whole of the workers; how can that discontent be used so as to bring about the New Birth of Society? That is the question we must always have before us. It is too much to hope that the *whole* working-class can be educated in the aims of Socialism in due time, before other surprises take place. But we *must* hope that a strong party can be so educated. Educated in economics, in organisation, and in administration. To such a body of men all the aspirations and vague opinion of the oppressed multitudes would drift, and little by little they would be educated by them, if the march of events should give us time; or if not, even half-educated they would follow them in any action which it was necessary to take.

To forge this head of the spear which is to pierce the armour of Capitalism is our business, in which *we must not fail*.

Let me ask our comrades to picture to themselves the consequences of an aimless revolt unexpectedly successful for the time; we will even suppose that it carries with it a small number of men capable of government and administration, though that is supposing a great deal. What would be the result unless the people had some definite aim, however limited?

The men thus floated to the surface would be powerless, their attempts at legislation would be misunderstood; disappointment and fresh discontent would follow, and the counter revolution would sweep them away at once.

But, indeed, it would not even come to that. History teaches us that no revolts that are without aim are successful even for a time; even the failures (some of them glorious indeed) had a guiding aim in them, which only lacked completeness.

The educational process, therefore, the forming a rallying point for definite aims is necessary to our success; but I must guard against misunderstanding. We must be no mere debating club, or philosophical society; we must take part in all really popular movements when we can make our own views on them unmistakably clear; that is a most important part of the education in organisation.

Education towards Revolution seems to me to express in three words what our policy should be: towards that New Birth of Society which we know must come, and which, therefore, we must strive to help forward so that it may come with as little confusion and suffering as may be.

One word to Socialists who do not belong to the League. I think there is a tendency abroad towards holding aloof from union on insufficient grounds. I do not urge formal union between those who really disagree as to principles, or the tactics which follow from them, since this results in quarrelling instead of the friendly difference which might otherwise be. But when the principles and tactics held are practically the same, it seems to me a great mistake for Socialist bodies

to hold aloof from each other. The present is no time for the formation of separate societies, whether central or local. Individual and organized intercourse is necessary to the education. I have been speaking of independence is sacrificed by this intercourse, and propaganda is made much easier by it. I appeal, therefore, to all who agree with us, individuals, local bodies, or central ones, to give up the mere name of independence in order to attain its reality, and to join our League so that we may show a firm front to the common enemy in these troublous yet hopeful times that are coming on us.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

LESSONS IN SOCIALISM.

IX.—THE LUST FOR SURPLUS-LABOUR—THE CORVÉE SYSTEM.

In our analysis of Marx' "Das Kapital," we now become students of history rather than of economics. Thus far in our study of commodities and their three values, of money and its four functions, of the transformation of money into capital, of surplus-value, its production and its rates, of constant and variable capital, and of the working day, we have dealt especially with the economical side of Socialism. From this difficult but very necessary study, we turn to another, not less necessary, and certainly less difficult. The study of the history of European countries, during the last 200 or 300 years will lead us to the same conclusion as the facts, arguments, and generalisations of economics; that the present capitalistic method of production is an iniquitous one, and that it must shortly give way to another more equitable, and less injurious to the community at large.

Some of the historical facts are now to be noted that bear upon the lust for surplus labour (that is, the labour expended by a human being after the equivalent of his means of subsistence has been produced by him). That which follows will be readily understood, even by those to whom the preceding notes have presented difficulties.

Surplus labour is no invention of the capitalist. Wherever in any time, or in any country, a man or a class of men has a monopoly of the means of production, there is exaction of surplus, unpaid labour from those having no share in the monopoly. In ancient Athens, Etruria, Rome the *kalos kai agathos* (the beautiful and the good man) the theocrat, ruler by the grace and with the power of God, the *civus romanus*, or Roman citizen, are examples. In the more modern England, America, Wallachia, the Norman baron, the slave-owner, the Boyard, keep up the same bad custom. It is as international as death. The most modern form and the one coming most home "to men's business and bosoms" in this country, is the landlord and capitalist of to-day.

Before passing to the particular phase of the general struggle between exploiters and exploited that has for its centre the length of the working day, let us look at the phenomena of the lust for surplus-labour, as shown in Eastern Europe under the corvée system. To do this will be of interest not only because we shall be again reminded of the cosmopolitan nature of the struggle between the possessing and the defrauded classes, but because of the likeness in difference that obtains between the corvée system and the capitalist system of the majority of civilised countries. In the corvée system surplus working time is clearly marked off from necessary working time (*i.e.*, from the time in which a man produces the equivalent of his own means of subsistence). In the capitalistic system the two kinds of labour glide into each other, so that one may say that 20 or 30 seconds *e.g.*, of a minute are necessary working time, 40 or 30 surplus working time, or even that a fraction of every second belongs to the former and the remaining fraction of the second to the latter. As a result of this difference it comes to pass that the capitalist aims at the lengthening of the working-day; the Boyard tries to get more days of corvée.

This system of corvée had its home in the provinces of Turkey that border the Black Sea to the East. From north to south these provinces run as follows: Moldavia, Bulgaria, Roumelia. To the north-east of Bulgaria, to the south of Moldavia, between these and Hungary lies Wallachia. Wallachia and Moldavia make up Roumania. At first in Roumania there was, as generally, community of soil. Part of the land was cultivated by members of the community individually; part of it as public land. From the latter were derived a reserve fund and a common store for the people at large. Then the usual sad series of changes set in. By fraud and by force, the public land and the labour spent on it were seized by dignitaries of the military and clerical order. Then arose the system of corvée, by which the peasants gave without remuneration time and labour to their master the Boyard.

Something of the nature of these arrangements before they were legalised and systematised, one may gather from a glance at them when they were reduced to a code. Roumania came into the possession of Turkey in 1739, under the treaty of Belgrade. It was occupied a short time by Russia, when the war of Greek independence broke out, and was again ceded to Turkey in 1829 by the treaty of Adrianople, when Greek independence was established.

In 1831 the Russian general Kisseleff proclaimed his "Règlement organique." Kisseleff was practically the Dictator over the Roumanian provinces from 1829 to 1835. The code in question was dictated by the Boyard, just as labour laws in England are drawn up solely by the employers of labour. The notables were assembled "to abolish the corvée," and the pretence was made that serfdom was by the terms of the règlement organique, ended. This is an instance of that Slav humour as to which occidental Europe is dull of comprehension.

The four chief terms of the code were: that each Wallachian peasant

owes to, his landlord first, certain payments in kind; second, twelve days of general labour; third, one day of field-labour; fourth, one day of wood-carrying; in all fourteen days in the year. Future students of history will certainly ask why 14 days? And they may, possibly, think out a connexion between these and the 14 days penalty of the police-court. One may fairly ask why even one day? Waiving, however, that initial, rational and, I believe, unanswerable enquiry, let us see how the line of these 14 days is stretched out by one device or another.

First of all, the working-day even under this arrangement is virtually one of 24 hours at least. The idea of it is based on the idea of the production of that which would require all the hours of the day and night. Actually each of the 14 days is equivalent to 3 days, and thus the modest demand of the Boyard swells at once to 42 days out of the year that are to be given up to him for nothing. That we are not misled upon this point by the wicked Socialist we may see by reference to the Règlement organique, where it is said in so many words that the one written day is the equivalent of three days of life.

Further, in addition to the 14, alias 42, days of ordinary labour, jobagie was legalised. This is service due on extraordinary occasions, estimated at not less than 14 days for each peasant.  $42 + 14 = 56$ . Out of 365 days in the year, therefore, 56 were sacred to the employer and non-payer of labour. But in reality the proportion is much greater than that represented by these numbers. For only 210 out of the 365 days of the year are in the climate of Roumania available for out-of-door work. Of these 210 another 40 may be taken off for Sundays and fête-days, another 30 for foul weather. These estimates err in favour of the boyard, not of the peasant.  $210 - 40 - 30 = 140$  working-days in the year. Of these 56 are surplus-labour days, wholly given up to the Boyard and to unpaid production for him.

The rate of surplus-value, we saw, was expressed by the fraction  $\frac{s.w.t.}{n.w.t.}$  *i.e.*, surplus working-time ÷ necessary working-time. In the case of the Wallachian boyard and peasant, on which the above figures are based, this rate becomes  $\frac{56}{84}$ .  $84 =$  the 140 days of total working-time minus the 56 days of surplus working-time.  $\frac{56}{84} = \frac{2}{3}$ . Of course the fraction of the whole time given away is  $\frac{56}{365} = \frac{2}{13}$ . Nor should English people lift up too readily their hands and voices at the enormity of this exploitation. It is certainly less than the amount of exploitation suffered by the English agricultural labourer or the English factory hand.

Nor are the devices of the Roumanian owner of all the means of production—even of the labourers' labour-power—at an end here. A very favourite plan is the giving to the peasant on one of his lord's days such a piece of work as cannot possibly be finished in the day. Thus the man is compelled to turn up again on the following day to finish it and to be exploited even beyond the legal limits. By a stretching and a twisting of legal terms again, the agricultural day may actually begin in May and end in October. One of the Boyards cries out in the jubilation of his soul, "the twelve days [of general labour] have become 365."

Surplus labour ... ..	Not the invention of Capital. Occurs wherever there is monopoly of means of production.
Examples ... ..	Athenian <i>kalos kai agathos</i> ; Etruscan theocrat, Roman citizen, Norman baron, American slave-owner, Wallachian Boyard, modern landlord and capitalist.
Corvée system ... ..	The giving of days of unpaid labour to the lord. S.w.t. clearly marked off from n.w.t.
Règlement organique ...	Chief terms affecting labour due from peasant to landlord: 1st., payments in kind; 2nd., 12 days of general labour; 3rd., 1 day for field labour; 4th, 1 day of wood carrying.
Jobagie... ..	Service due on extraordinary occasions. 14 days for each peasant.
Working year ... ..	365 days—155 (bad seasons)—40 (Sundays and fête days)—30 (bad weather) = 140 working days.
Rate of s.v. ... ..	$\frac{56}{84} = \frac{2}{3}$ .

EDWARD AVELING.

CIVILISATION.

"Oh, if the accursed invisible nightmare, that is crushing out the life of us and ours, would take a shape; approach us like the Hyrcanian tiger, the behemoth of chaos, the archfiend himself; in any shape that we could see and fasten on!" These, the words of Thomas Carlyle, express the sentiments of every truly earnest man and woman. Who is this enemy that stalks throughout the land and renders futile all human effort?

Perhaps there are some that think human effort has not been futile, has hitherto been very successful. Do we not read perpetually of this nineteenth century of ours, its marvels, its improvements? Are we not continually being told that there never was an age like this, that there never were such clever and enlightened men anywhere at any time? Look at our means of locomotion, of communication; our bridges and buildings—what can we not make, what can we not do? Man never had such power over Nature before. To say, therefore, that all human effort has hitherto proved futile is surely to say what cannot be true.

To decide whether any given effort has or has not been successful, it