

THE COMMONWEAL

The Official Journal of the Socialist League.

VOL. 3.—No. 85.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 27, 1887.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

NOTES ON NEWS.

Mr. Thompson has been able to lay before the public in the columns of the *Echo* the evidence in the case of our comrade Pole of the S. D. F., and it must be said that if the magistrates who sentenced him to two months' hard labour have nothing to say in contradiction of the facts as there stated, they cannot clear themselves of the crime of sending an innocent man to prison, whom they must have known to be innocent.

The public can scarcely fail to see this, and another blow will be struck at this monstrous abuse of the magistrates' court with its body-guard of professional witnesses, who, like all policemen, consider, and are bound to consider, that it is their business, if there is any breach of the peace, to get hold of a prisoner and to convict him when they have got hold of him, at whatever expense to truth and justice may be necessary.

The stupidity of the police in the case of Mdlle. Drouin is only what might be expected of these gentry, and no doubt many dynamite scares have had about as good a foundation as this one; but how are honest citizens to guard themselves against it? Are we to have an artist and a chemist attached to every police centre to inform the guardians of law and order what modelling clay is, and to assure them that the only danger it is fraught with is that it may be worked up into futile and ugly images?

Among other cases of legal oppression comes the hideous tale of Mr. Justice Field and the luckless Welsh girl; concerning which what can words do to express due indignation against such a sentence? But one thing we must remember: these and similar cases of the injustice of the law are being brought to light plentifully now; but we must not suppose that they are uncommon, and that there is only by some accident a passing shower of them at present. It cannot be doubted that they are of constant occurrence. Nay more, bad as they are, they are only extreme examples of the ordinary deeds of the law; it works in this way habitually and can work no otherwise; it is a machine constructed for the production of injustice; that is the sober truth.

Whatever may be thought about the guilt or innocence of Lipski, the whole circumstances of the trial call for a remark on one point in criminal trials which jurymen should remember, and which they are too apt to forget, that it is *they* who are the *judges*; they, not persons educated by professional experience and—cant, into callousness and disregard of everything but the rules of the game; but citizens and neighbours discharging part of their daily responsibility for the good of the community, and judging the matter by the rules of common sense and the experience of ordinary daily life. This is still the theory of the jury, and before centralised bureaucracy had quite overlaid the customs of the freemen of the tribes it was the practice also; but as things go now, the judge oftenest usurps the function of the jury, and his summing up is the real verdict. Let any one who sits on a jury, especially in a criminal case, take this to heart, and, as far as he is personally concerned, redress it.

Meantime it is a good thing that the public are having their attention turned to its worst abuses; they will soon see that they are helpless to cure them, if only they begin to try; for their conception of the law is that it is an impartial power that enforces respect to the due rights of the citizens, that it arranges personal differences between man and man. This is just their mistake, its real business is to defend property at the expense of personal rights.

Mr. Bradlaugh has received what may be called a new title at the hands of Lord Wemyss; he has been dubbed the "defender of the faith," so to say; protector of the sanctities of "free contract" (*i.e.*, the leave to whack one's own nigger) against the original sin, which is now discovered to be a part of nineteenth century human nature, of paying some attention to the general welfare of the community. It may be doubtful as to how much Mr. Bradlaugh relishes this distinction, in spite of his anti-Socialist proclivities; it is not doubtful that the whirligig of time brings about curious revenges. Who are to be the next allies, I wonder?—Chamberlain and Salisbury, Wemyss and Bradlaugh! It is no use hazarding a guess; yet strange things may happen to Socialists if ever they get into the House of Commons, and they may have queer distinctions thrust upon them; they had better keep out of it altogether.

W. M.

A LABOUR POLICY.

WHEREVER there is oppression there is rebellion—if there be any vitality in the people at all. The form this rebellion takes almost entirely depends on the stage which the oppression has reached. If the oppression be in the growth of its power the rebellion will simply mean resistance to each fresh development, but if the oppression has reached its height and its power begins to wane, the rebellion assumes a definite and aggressive shape—it becomes revolution; that is, it not only resists the wrong, it prepares to stop it and to replace it by a just system. This has been illustrated by English history. Since the tyranny of the capitalists began, rebellion against it began. At first the workers could only protest by riots, insurrections, machinery-breaking and strikes against the wrongs under which they had to labour. As time went on their rebellion became more systematic. Now the time is at hand when the working-class must no longer be satisfied with protests against their misery; they must prepare to end it and to organise a happier state of society. Socialism is simply this most advanced stage of the labour movement. It aims at changing the present system of society in which the rich idlers live by plundering the poor workers, and the poor live only on the sufferance of the rich, into a system where both are merged in one body, all doing their meet share of the world's work, and enjoying a like share of its wealth.

The Socialist party has no interests in antagonism to other labour organisations. It only differs from them in this, that they fight for the interests of a *part* of the people, while Socialism aims at the good of *all*; they try to cure *part* of the economic evils, to stop *some* of the plundering, while Socialism aims at *preventing* the evils and bringing about an honest system. For instance, trades' unionism means securing to the workers a larger share of the fruits of their labour; Socialism means securing to the workers the full fruits of their labour. Co-operation means checking the shopkeeping section of the traders from cheating the people; Socialism means stopping all sections of traders from cheating the people. Therefore, there cannot be any antagonism between these movements and the Socialist movement. Socialism embraces all other Labour movements, and the very gist of the Socialist policy is to combine all sectional Labour movements into one solid array with a clearly defined aim; to focus the energies of the societies which are struggling here and there, and direct the whole united force to the achievement of the economic emancipation of Labour.

This task is a heavy one, and not to be hastily dismissed. There will be a good deal of jarring before the different sections agree and get into their right places. But it is now the urgent duty of all who seriously wish to advance the cause of labour to consider how the different movements having practically the same interests will regard each other. There has been too much sneering and gibing between Reformers and Revolutionists, and too little useful discussion. It is because reform is useless that revolution is necessary. The people must have justice. If justice cannot be gained by *reforming* the present system that shows the inherent badness of the system, and the only thing to do is to abolish it and replace it by another system.

It is now clear that as foreign competition and the development of machinery increases, the lot of the labourer is becoming more precarious. During the last fourteen years the condition of the workers in all the great industries has been steadily getting worse; wages have gone down, and employment is less secure. The employers allege that they are also getting worse off, which is true to a large extent. The simple and sensible explanation of our chronic trade depression is the production of goods beyond the power of our markets, both at home and abroad, to sell at a profit for the investors or capitalists. For profit-making purposes, there is a glut of goods and a glut of the means of production. Not only are our warehouses overflowing, but the land is lying waste, the machinery is going to rust, and the army of unemployed is regularly growing larger and larger. The capitalist and the working-class are alike helpless in this position of affairs. So long as both maintain the present system of production for profit this state of things can only go from bad to worse until the system is changed.

In future papers I shall try to lay down the Socialist attitude towards Trades' Unionism and Co-operation, and to sketch a line of action by which Socialists who are in these movements may work them on to the right lines of action. In thus trying to conciliate other working-class organisations, let it be understood that I am not in the