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POLITICAL NOTES.

THE "row" in the House of Commons of March 3 gives us an indication of what is coming, if we take it along with the hints as to what the Coercion Bill is likely to be. The Chief Secretary's insults and tall talk mean pretty much the lion lashing his tail just before his wrath (or hunger) takes the practical form of a spring and a blow. Or perhaps it may with greater accuracy be compared with the demeanour of the Highlanders, walking about and snorting to stimulate their warlike spirits before they pull out point-and-edge, as described by Walter Scott in 'Rob Roy.'

The Tory supporters of the Government have bidden them to get angry and act. They are trying to get angry so that they may act, since there is no way out of it; but no doubt their feelings are not very enviable at present. They must be full of dismal forebodings that their action will draw on a state of things which only strong men could deal with and avoid the mingled curses and laughter which accompany absurd failure in "strong"—i.e., tyrannical—measures.

The Irish nation have shown such admirable qualities through this struggle, such steadiness of purpose, and persistence in union, that they may be trusted to deal satisfactorily with this long expected crisis; all the more as they must be seeing clearly final victory drawing nearer and nearer to them. But what allies will they have among English parties outside the sympathy of the outcast Socialists?

As parties or sections what allies can they have? It would be absurd to appeal to the Liberal party to further those aspirations towards freedom which it is its very business to restrain. And as to the Radical party, where is it and what is it except the feeble tail of this same feebly reactionary Liberal party?

The only appeal that can be made is to those few Radicals who have any title to the name to break off from their Liberal party if it shows, as it certainly will show, the slightest sign of wavering in steady opposition to coercion without any great nicety as to the means. For in good truth, if the Government are going to put forward an effective Coercion Bill, as according to all reports they are, they will give the signal for civil war.

Here is the position in all its simplicity. On the one hand a people determined according to its lights to win freedom for itself. On the other hand a government which is determined that this people shall not be free, and after having exhausted all half measures of mingled chicanery and force, with a thin gloss of professed respect for "constitutionalism" (whatever that may mean), is now driven to throw off the mask, and to say there shall no longer be any semblance of freedom in Ireland, and the expression of opinion shall be considered, or even the implication of opinion shall be considered, as treasonable action in the egg and shall be suppressed and shut up in jail accordingly. What is to come out of this position? Who is to give way, Ireland or the reactionary party of Great Britain? If the former is to be crushed, the struggle will not be long before it reappears, not as civil war in Ireland, but as civil war in England. W. M.

CRIMINAL LAW UNDER SOCIALISM.

PROBABLY few persons realise the extent to which crime is reducible to the question of private property. There are few orders of crime which are not traceable directly or indirectly to possession and the desire of possession. In the first place we have the largest and most important section of offences recognised by law, those which may be comprehended under the phrase "unlawful appropriation," i.e., theft and robbery in all their forms. Here, of course, is a vast body of crime which would be practically impossible in a state of society in which the necessaries and comforts of life were within the reach of all, and when the fact of possession did not carry with it the possibility of surplus-value. Then, again, there is the indecent class of crime. This is largely a consequence of the hypocritical sexual relations at present obtaining, resulting from the institution of monogamic marriage, which is in its form based on our existing property-relations—although here matters of pure pathology have properly to be taken into account. Thirdly, we have the description of crime coming under

the head of *brutal assaults*, or malicious injuries (including murder). This last is usually associated with one or other of the two former departments, most frequently with crimes against property but not always. Fourthly, must be included perjury or false-witness in all its forms. We shall find that all serious crimes (as distinguished from mere misdemeanour, as it is termed, and from political offences) is comprised within these four categories, the first embracing all crimes primarily against property, the three last all crimes primarily against the person, it matters not whether the question of property enters secondarily into them or not.

Now, largely as the present condition of society is directly responsible for crime, and still more largely as it is so indirectly, we can hardly hope that a change of economic condition would do more immediately than efface the crimes directly connected with property. The gradual elimination of the remainder would be effected in the process of the development of the new order, but not entirely at once. We cannot, therefore, treat this question in the snakes-in-Iceland fashion we were able to do when dealing with civil law under Socialism in a previous article. But, nevertheless, I take it that the *régime* of a Socialist administration will involve an enormous change of attitude in dealing with crime. Firstly, it will without doubt reduce to the minimum the number of actions characterised by the law as crimes. Secondly, it will probably regard the greatest possible consideration for the criminal compatible with the maintenance of social existence at all, as its first duty in the matter. Thirdly, it will assuredly withdraw the right of prosecution from private individuals and vest it wholly and solely in the delegates of society.

The interest of the legal body, so influential in all modern legislatures, is to increase to the utmost the cognisance of the criminal law over actions. In this they are aided and abetted by a number of persons who entertain a pet hobby against particular vices (real or "so-called"), and are always prepared to agitate for their elevation to the rank of crimes. The legal luminaries who assist in this are quite indifferent to the fact, of which they must be well aware, that the wider the range of law-made crime, the greater the chance of innocent persons being, if not convicted at least accused, and their characters thereby blasted. And these, be it remembered, are the gentlemen who are so zealous in defending the law of libel as a necessary protection of character. It is monstrous, they pretend to think, that a man who has done an action deemed discreditably should have it proclaimed on the platform or in the press, but it is a "mere natural" misfortune incident to human affairs that an innocent person should be put to the annoyance and inconvenience of being hauled up before a police-court to answer a trumped-up charge, which it may nevertheless be very difficult to disprove to the satisfaction of the public.

Of course, all that these "legal gentlemen" care for, is to maintain and increase the business of the courts, civil and criminal. To such commercial principles are their zeal for the protection of character and the suppression of crime in the last resort reducible. A Socialist society, whose aim would be to reduce the machinery of law to the minimum, would rely for the preservation of public morals precisely on that publicity which the legal crime-manufacturer tries so energetically to suppress for the protection of character. And in the end, he would undoubtedly find this a more powerful agent for the repression of crime than the most elaborately comprehensive code, designed for laying direct hands on the persons of offenders. When there is no interest at stake in the maintenance of judicial machinery, the number of law-made crimes must inevitably diminish.

That a Socialist administration would treat delinquents with the utmost leniency consistent with the existence of society will, I take it, not be disputed. The failure of organised brutality as a correction to crime has been attested over and over again by experience. Were the brutal punishments of earlier phases of society effectual in repressing crime? The panegyrist of modern civilisation are never tired of impressing upon us the great advances made in respect of crime, both as to diminution and treatment. It has been shown constantly that a particular offence has actually diminished on the repeal of brutal enactments bearing on it. Yet, strange to say, these very panegyrist of modern civilisation are frequently the first to cry out for *deterrent* punishments and long sentences, and to dilate on the maintenance of prison "discipline" (the specious euphemism for the inhumanity practised in our gaols). To convince themselves of the needlessness of so-called "prison discipline," they have only to cast an eye on some of the Swiss cantons (notably Geneva), where imprisonment means little more than simple reclusion, and where they will find that even a bourgeois society holds together without any of the