

# THE COMMONWEAL

## The Official Journal of the SOCIALIST LEAGUE.

VOL. 4.—No. 132.

SATURDAY, JULY 21, 1888.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

### ANTI-SWEATING DEMONSTRATION

IN

HYDE PARK, SUNDAY, JULY 22, 1888.

The Socialist League has appointed the following, who will speak on its behalf from Platform No. 6:—

WM. MORRIS. W. B. PARKER. H. H. SPARLING. J. TOCHATTI.  
J. LANE. F. KITZ.

The following is the resolution which will be moved at the meeting:

*"That this meeting, while protesting against the extortion practised under what is known as the Sweating System, points out that this is a necessary result of production for profit, and must continue until that is put an end to; and it therefore calls upon all workers to combine in order to bring about the Social Revolution, which will place the means of production and exchange in the hands of the producers."*

The following are the times and places of meeting:—

S.E.		N.W.	
Deptford ... ..	1.45	Cobden Statue ... ..	3.15
Brick Lane Station ... ..	2.50	Fitzroy Square ... ..	3.30
(And wait for those from Bermondsey, Walworth, and Peckham.)		(Down Tottenham Court Road.)	
Obelisk, Blackfriars Road ... ..	3.15	Paddington Green ... ..	3.45
St. Thomas's Hospital ... ..	3.35		
Victoria ... ..	4.0	S.W.	
		Wandsworth Plain ... ..	2.15
EAST END.		Prince's Head, Battersea ... ..	2.55
Canning Town ... ..	1.0	York Road Station ... ..	3.25
Poplar ... ..	1.15	Chelsea Bridge ... ..	3.40
Via Burdett Road, Mile End		Sloane Square ... ..	3.45
Waste ... ..	2.15	Knightsbridge ... ..	4.5
Whitechapel Road, Commercial Street ... ..	2.45	W.	
(Wait for those from the Triangle, Hackney)... ..	2.30	Prebend Street, Islington ... ..	2.30
Mansion House ... ..	3.0	Clerkenwell Green ... ..	3.0
to		to	
Holborn Circus ... ..	3.20	Holborn Circus ... ..	3.20
		Due at	
		Tottenham Court Road ... ..	3.45

### SWEATERS AND SWEATERS.

No. 1.—MATCHES BY THE FACTORY DRILL.

THE London Trades' Council having taken up the strike of the match girls, it did at any rate go on long enough to force the attention of even the stupidest of the capitalist class, and the girls have at least gained something out of the struggle; and surely nobody but the cruellest as well as the stupidest of bourgeois will grudge them that small gain. For the rest, like other strikes, it is a necessary incident in the war of capital and labour; whatever may be the fate of any particular strike, the whole mass of strikes forms one side of this great war: if there were no strikes but those which were likely to succeed in times like the present, the manufacturing capitalists would have an easy time of it, and would reduce the workers under their control to the very lowest point of misery; but as it is, even people in such a wretched condition as these poor match girls can make themselves felt temporarily, and can help to swell the mass of opposition to the manufacturers' ideal, to wit, human machinery which will give not more, but less, trouble than the machinery of mere dead matter, and will be as contented as that; so that Mrs. Besant and the others whose exertions have made this strike possible have done and are doing good service.

It is curious, though, to see how the capitalist press have straightway set their backs up, and set to work to whitewash the extremely "respectable" firm—company, I should say—who live on this miserable industry. What has become of the "Bitter Cry" and all the fashionable slumming which followed it? Why, this industry, which

is of such commercial importance to the world—of shareholders—is just the very thing that all that deedless sympathy was poured out on; and yet now we find the press, which was so "interested" in the affairs of the East End workers four years ago, is quite content to leave the match girls to the tender mercies of Messrs. Bryant and May and other such benefactors of the human race; and if any attempt is set on foot to make these poor folk conscious of the fact that they are part of a great class which *must* struggle for existence and *should* struggle for a decent life, immediately we find the papers, to say the least of it, tender of the rich and harshly critical of the poor, scattering broadcast inuendoes against the disinterested people who really feel the "Bitter Cry," telling mere lies about the events of the strike, chuckling over the slavery of the poor wretches who hug their chains and are angry with the strikers for making them risk the loss of the starvation wages which they are doomed to exist on. Such shabby people as these, and the public for which they write, who simply want to be mildly amused by other people's troubles, are not likely to note one lesson which would seem to be pretty clearly taught by the exposure of this manufacture to the light of day, and that is the utter helplessness of any philanthropic remedies for these miseries, or, indeed, any remedies but the one remedy of destruction of the whole system under which they are possible; still less are they likely to see that this flourishing and respectable company, the names of whose managers are a kind of household words, is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the competition for profits which is the "bond of society" at present. The superstition of the "cultivated classes" of to-day concerning the necessity of profit-grinding is as gross as ever superstition was. I take as an illustration a sentence from an article in the *Daily News* by a well-intentioned sort of person apparently, and read:—"These poor people are really the victims, 'not of any exceptional greed or hard usage of Messrs. Bryant and May' (close shavers, though, my friend!) but of that steady onward rush of the great industrial machine whose course is directed not by the needs and welfare of those immediately beneath its wheels, but of the community at large for generations to come."

Well! that is tall talk. Let us pick this match-making business from "the steady onward rush," and see what it means. It is a very simple story, and a very shabby one. A lot of helpless girls and women are driven by fear of mere destitution to hire themselves out at starvation wages to do mechanical and unhealthy work; they are cleverly drilled by a perfected system which aims at wasting nothing (except human life) and the result of their labour is sold at the lowest price possible in order that the money passing through the hands of the company may be turned as often as possible; and in order to do that even the wretched wages are clipped by fines, which have the double advantage of helping in the drilling as well as saving the wage outlay. That is the process; what is the gain that comes of it, beyond the keeping alive in misery a number of girls? Certain persons are able to live a luxurious and useless life without working, and matches are made so cheap that the public buy twice as many as they want of them and waste half. Here is a gain indeed for "the generations to come"! Are we so helpless that this shabby story is to be told over and over again, and the sad fact always a-doing? Once more, a farthing box of matches is no great plunder to take from a "victim" of the great industrial machine, and, on the whole, I think it would be better to try to direct it "by the needs and welfare of those immediately beneath its wheels"—only you cannot, as long as the machine is composed of capital and wage-slavery. You can only help whatever tends towards upsetting the said machine. And all wise men will do so, and spread discontent till we make a better bargain than selling ourselves to the Devil—for nothing.

No. 2.—PASSING ON THE PINCH.

It is noteworthy that we are to-day having the extreme form of the systems of the robbery of the worker dragged up before the public gaze. On the one hand there is this system of the complete merciless drill of the factory, obvious authoritative compulsion, and on the other the compulsion which passes through the links of the sweating system, in the last link of which mere obvious necessity of bread-earning compels the poor sweater to compel. When the two systems are brought face to face it will be seen that there is little enough to chose

between them, because after all there are plenty of links between the idle appropriator of the results of other people's labour and the workman in the factory system; the various managers, clerks, and foremen are the sweating machinery in this case, and many of these are of the working-class just as the sweating tailor is. It is true that the organised sweating system carries the misery a stage lower down, in spite of the shameless defence of it which is being made before the Lords' Commission, and the last link the poor sweater is a speciality of the system, and a disgrace even to our disgraceful sham society. But it must never be forgotten, and we must repeat it again here, that all capitalistic production which is not purely individual, as the work of the doctor or the artist, is done by means of sweating in some form or other. It is the knowledge, conscious or otherwise, of this fact which gives some of the witnesses before the Lords' Commission courage to stand up and represent their horrible industry as a benefit to humanity; they cannot help feeling that the sympathy of the lords and gentlemen on the Commission will be accorded to those respectable people who are performing the whole duty of modern man by making a profit, even if they are forced by circumstances to be the instruments of inflicting misery upon other people; for as our worthy friend in the *Daily News* on the match-girls sees, that is the necessary process of commercial production: in short, the respectable factory capitalist excuses the sweater, respectable or not. Doubtless the conclusion that will be expressed in the report of the Commission on Sweating will be that the evils of the system have been much exaggerated, that the worst form of it is not widespread, that the system, with whatever exaggerated evils belong to it, is necessary to civilisation, nay, to humanity; all this probably in much these words, and as a practical rider to the conclusion, though *not* openly stated, that we the commission recommend that something be pretended to be done to keep the people quiet.

A friend of mine once expostulated with a hatter for the price he charged for his hats; the hatter had been dining, and wine inspired him to tell the truth. "Mr. ———," said he "how can I live in the style in which I do unless I charge you at least as high?"

This is really the conclusion which the Sweating Commission must come to. The misery of those who are sweated, whether by the drill of the factory or the many links of the sweating chain, is the high price that we pay for the glory of sustaining a class of idle rich men. Is the gain worth the price? Working men, it is for you to answer the question, and act according to your answer.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

## THE REVOLT OF GHENT.

(Continued from p. 218.)

PEACE being made, the Earl is rather shy of Ghent, and takes up his quarters at Bruges, no doubt playing his old game of setting the towns against one another. The citizens of Ghent (one may suppose the respectables chiefly) are anxious for their Feudal Lord to come amongst them, so that they may be sure that the peace is really kept. After much persuasion, the Earl comes ungraciously enough, and the very first thing he says to "the men of the Law," as Froissart calls them—that is, the municipal chiefs, who go out to meet him—is thus given by Froissart: "Sirs, good peace requireth nothing but peace; and I would that these White Hats were laid down and amends made for the death of my Bailey, for I am sore required therein of all his lineage."

Here is the smouldering fire stirred again. "The men of the Law" answer humbly enough, and beg the Earl to come into the great square the next day and "preche to the people"; but the White Hoods make up their minds to be part of his audience. Well, he comes, and looks very angrily at the White Hoods; then from a window with a red cloth before him he makes a speech nearly as long as one of Mr. Gladstone's, winding up with a demand for the disbanding of the White Hoods. "At all these words that he spake before every man held their peace; but when he spake of the White Hats there was such a murmuring and whispering that it might well be perceived that it was for that cause."

In short, he took himself out of the town in a day or two in the worst possible temper.

The Ghentmen did not deceive themselves as to his intentions, and fell to victualling the town for a siege. Here Froissart moralises: "The rich sage and notable persons cannot excuse themselves of these deeds at the beginning. For when John Lyon first began to bring up the White Hats they might have caused them to have been laid down if they had lyst, and have sent other manner of persons against the pioneers of Bruges than they: but they suffered it because they would not meddle, nor be in no business nor press. All this they did and consented to be done, the which after they dearly bought, and specially such as were rich and wise: for after, they were no more lords of themselves, nor they durst not speak, nor do anything but as they of Ghent would. For they (the men of Ghent) said that neither for John Lyon nor for Gilbert Matthew nor for their wars nor broiles they would never depart asunder: for whatsoever war there were between one or other they would ever be all one, and ever ready to defend the franchises of their town. The which was well seen after; for they made war which endured seven years; in the which time there was never strife among them in the town: and that was the thing that sustained and kept them most of anything, both within and without: they were in such unity that there was no distance among them, as ye shall hear after in this history."

An outrage and reprisals follow. The kindred of Roger Dauterne, the slain Bailey, come upon forty ships of the Ghentmen in the Scheld, and put out the eyes of the mariners and maim them, and so send them home to Ghent. In return for this horror John Pruniaux, Captain of the White Hoods, marches suddenly on Oudenarde and beats down the two towers and gates of that town looking toward Ghent and the wall between them. The Earl of course is or feigns to be greatly enraged; though the rulers of Ghent refuse to avow the deed; but after some coming and going a sort of a peace is patched up again; Oudenarde is given up by the Ghentmen, John Pruniaux on the one side and the maimers of the mariners on the other side are banished: and on these terms of peace the curtain falls again.

It rises on a lordly act of dastardliness on the part of the Earl, who gets John Pruniaux delivered to him by the Duke of Burgundy and strikes off his head. Also, "Then the Earl went to Ypres and did here great justice, and beheaded many evil-ruled people such as had been at the death of his five Knights there slain and had opened the gates to them of Ghent."

This lordly fashion of keeping the peace was not well seen to by the Ghentmen, and the war began again more sternly than ever, and also now took more definitely the aspect of a class struggle. "Then Peter du Bois<sup>1</sup> said: Sirs, if ye will believe me there shall not a house stand upright of never a gentleman in the country about Ghent. . . . That is truth, said all the other. Let us go forth and beat them all down."

Which was not a mere flourish of speech, as the White Hoods, who are now identified with the town of Ghent, set to work at once; so that "when the gentlemen knights and squires being at Lysle with the Earl and thereabout heard tidings how their houses were burnt and beaten down, they were right sore displeased, and not without good cause." In short, the Earl let loose his chivalry on Ghent, his bastard son the Hase of Flanders at their head, and there was plenty of hard skirmishing after the fashion of the time.

The Ghentmen for their part summoned their vassals "the knights and squires of Heynault" to come and do them service for their holdings under pain of forfeiture; as also their Constable or Burgrave, Hervé Dantoing. It was a matter of course that the gentlemen did not come, and that the Constable sent an insolent and threatening answer. The Ghentmen retorted by destroying the houses of their disobedient vassals, who had legally forfeited their rights. This incident is a curious illustration of the mediæval *status*: the burgesses of Ghent, who were not noble, yet in their collective capacity could claim the services of noblemen, who held lands under feudal service to the town, and legally punish them for disobedience.

Well, on the part of Ghent the war went on briskly enough; but though they were still in nominal alliance with the other cities, yet in the latter, and especially in Bruges, the mean crafts had not the same power as in Ghent, and any defeat was certain to detach Bruges, and likely to detach Ypres and Courtray from the popular cause. Bruges fell off first; there was a struggle between the respectables and the mean crafts in the town, in which the former were victorious, and they at once sent to invite the Earl among them. To Bruges he came nothing loth. "At the Earl's coming were taken all the principals of them that had their hearts Ghentoise, and such as were suspect, and so were put in prison more than 500, and little by little their heads were stricken off." After this stroke of resolute government Bruges became the headquarters of the Earl, and the war began to go heavily against the Ghentmen.

The Earl marched with a considerable army to attack Thorout and Ypres, and the Ghentmen sent two bodies of men for the relief of those towns under the command of Peter du Bois, John Bull, and Arnold Clarke. But the affair was ill-managed; the two corps missed supporting each other, and that commanded by John Bull fell into an ambuscade, and one of those curious mediæval routs took place, which some of us may the better understand after the sights of Bloody Sunday.

Peter du Bois, cool and wary as usual, held his men together and retreated to Ghent; but the fugitives from John Bull's corps, who with him had got into Courtray, in their rage and terror slew their captain, and both Ypres and Courtray fell. The Earl massacred 700 of the mean crafts in Ypres "to encourage the others," and sent off 300 hostages to prison in Bruges, and afterwards 200 from Courtray. 3,000 of the Ghentois fell in the combat before Ypres.

The Earl then besieged Ghent, but loosely enough, as the Ghentmen were able to get supplies from Brussels, Brabant, and Liege, and generally from the whole country behind them, where the people were in complete sympathy with the rebels, especially in Liege.

A sharp combat took place before Nivelles, where the Ghentmen were again defeated, with the loss of two of their captains, Rafe of Harselles, a man of noble blood, and John Launoy. Of this matter Froissart, telling how the Ghentmen retreated into the church at Nivelles, says: "John de Launoy all abashed and discomforted entered into the minster to save himself, and went into the steeple, and such of his company as could get in with him, and Rafe de Harselles abode behind him and recoiled his company, and did great feats of arms at the door, but finally he was stricken with a long pike through the body and so slain. Thus ended Rafe of Harselles, who had been a great captain in Ghent against the Earl; and the Ghentois loved him greatly because of his wisdom and prowess, but for his valiantness this was his end and reward."

The Earl bade his men set fire to the church, and I give you the

<sup>1</sup> Peter Bush would be his due English name.