

THE COMMONWEAL

The Official Journal of the SOCIALIST LEAGUE.

[REGISTERED FOR TRANSMISSION ABROAD.]

VOL. 5.—No. 171.

SATURDAY, APRIL 20, 1889.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

NOTES ON NEWS.

THERE has been a sharp discussion going on in the columns of the *Star* as to whether the Socialists or Social Democrats (which on the whole is the properer name for those really implicated) ought to respond to the invitation of the *Star* Radicals to form some sort of alliance with them. Mr. Hyndman began the discussion in a very able letter, in which he pointed out the indisputable fact, that in whatever the present day Radicals differ from the Liberals they owe the distinction to the adoption of Socialist views; and in which he asserted that though it was natural for the Radicals to seek for the alliance it would be wise for the Socialists to refrain from it.

This discussion must clearly have to do with the position of Radicals and Socialists as *parties*, for already on many occasions Socialists have not hesitated to ally themselves with the Radicals for a purpose which seemed clear to both. For example, the League as well as the S.D.F. has shown itself at almost all the anti-Coercion meetings where they thought they could be of service in pushing forward what appeared to them a revolutionary movement. We cannot declare against a proposition merely because Radicals (or for the matter of that Tories) agree to it.

But as to parties? It is quite true, as Mr. Hyndman implies, that in all alliances between parties the stronger uses the weaker and throws it off when it finds it convenient to do so: running the risk, however, meantime of finding that the weaker party has, as it were, eaten its way into the skin of the stronger and so destroyed it. It is equally true also that the stronger or respectable party must make its programme from the programme of the weaker, spoiling it as much as it dares to do in the process.

And then what is a party? Our old acquaintance, Mr. Mahon, in a letter to the *Star*, says that there is no Socialist party, but only a propaganda; his view being, I suppose, that for the sake of gaining the advantages of "a party" the Socialists should merge themselves in the Radical party. But, after all, is there a Radical party? There are plenty of Radicals, doubtless; but how can they be called a party when they themselves are now declaring for what they at least believe to be a modified Socialism, and yet they must feel or simulate enthusiasm for their leader, Mr. Gladstone, who has never heard of Socialism, and for their other leader, Mr. Morley, who knows just enough about it to be able to use phrases which repudiate it? Their policy is to attach themselves to the Liberals and work them to further their semi-Socialism, just as some of our Social Democratic friends want to work the Radicals to further their Socialism. They have no party leaders and no party representatives.

And what is a Radical? I mean, of course, a Radical of to-day. The *Star* in its answer to Mr. Hyndman really answers this question quite ingeniously, and shows us that a Radical of the new type is a man who would believe in Socialism if he could only find out what it is, and who would cast Whiggery aside if he could only convince himself of its being possible to carry on without it. The *Star*, which we have been taking all along as the representative of this view, often prints sheer Socialism, which we have been glad to quote at times; but also often exhibits the most commonplace Whiggery. Therefore, without imputing any bad faith to its disclaimer of using Socialism as "political birdlime," I say it is being so used, and I don't agree with its prophecy that when Home Rule is got it will still advocate this semi-Socialist Radicalism. On the contrary, we may be sure that the Gladstonian success will produce a fresh cleavage; the Whig element in Radicalism will declare itself Whig (or Tory, it does not matter which), and the Socialist element will declare itself Socialist.

At the same time I think we must accept with cheerfulness this fact of Radicalism permeated by Socialism. Six years ago the attitude of the Radicals, even the furthest advanced of them, was Mr. John Morley's "I don't know you." And now what are these words in the

leader of a Radical paper about contract? "It" (the new Radicalism) "does not recognise that free contract exists between the workers and the capitalists, the landlord and the tenant." My Radical friends, that is an attack on the very palladium of Radicalism; on the recognition of that free contract between the monopolist and his "dependent" our present holy society rests. What middle course can there be between that "Free Contract" and the abolition of monopoly?

But the *Star* wavers through its terror of the might of Whiggery: "It does recognise that if such contracts are made, they should be subject to the constant revision in the interests of the weaker party." O impotent conclusion! For it means the robber shall still be allowed to rob, but that some of his stealings shall be taken away from him. How much? "A great deal if I can manage it," says the Radical. "None at all, if I can help it," says the Monopolist, "I and my armed executive." What can come of these two differences of opinion in the long run? Abolition of monopoly in the teeth of the monopolist—nothing else.

Meantime, while the Radicals are drifting towards Socialism, let Socialists be contented to be a propaganda and not a party. A propaganda can afford to have principles genuinely believed in by its members; a party in order to constitute itself must give up some principle, or make a semblance of doing so, which semblance is very likely to grow into a reality; and when it has got as far as that, this mere piece of opportunism is likely to become a shibboleth which all members of the party must utter or be boycotted. The Socialist propaganda has done perhaps already more than we who have been living amongst it know. It ever there should be a Socialist party, at least let there be a Socialist propaganda of principle existing beside it and not tied to it. I am sure that we cannot do without that, whichever way politics may turn.

W. M.

At a special meeting on Thursday 11th, the London County Council by 64 votes to 31, passed the following resolution:

"That London is the only city in Great Britain which, whilst paying the expenses of the police, has no voice in its control or management; that this state of things is anomalous, unjust, and unworthy of the first city in the empire; and this Council therefore cannot doubt that Parliament will take an early opportunity of supplementing its scheme of local government for London by transferring the management of the police to the Council."

The question had been partly debated on the previous Tuesday, and was then adjourned to Thursday. The discussion was an interesting and instructive one, but of course in these days of the Parnell Commission the reports in the daily press met with little mercy from the editorial blue pencil. So that few people know much of what was said. One good thing was that the opposition speeches were most fully reported, their "arguments" given unutilated.

Among the worst of the reactionary speeches were those of two *Star* "progressives," Lord Lingen and Mr. Frederick Harrison. The last named, lifting his olympian eyebrows, told the Council that it was only a "conglomerate vestry," and wholly incompetent to control a police force on which the safety of the empire depended!

Mr. Marks, representative of the *Financial News* and mouthpiece of the money-bag, held that London was the refuge of "the rag-tag and bob-tail of creation," who needed to be held down with a strong hand. Dr. Longstaff had a fit of mob upon the brain, and was skilfully treated by John Burns, who followed him, saying: "If we have vicious and criminal classes in London, if we have the rag-tag and bob-tail of creation—and I don't deny that we have, *specially at the West-end*—the proper method of dealing with them is not to bludgeon them, but to remove the causes that produce them."

Colonel Rotton, a fiery little man, with twenty-two years uneventful military service behind him, was great in support of discipline and law'n-order. Colonel Howard Vincent posed as the ex-prefect of police, and was learned, statistical, and Cassandra-like by turns;