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 proper 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 an 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 the socialistic creed; 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 they have thought, even at the risk 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 repel 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 show 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 birdling,” I say it is being so used, and I don’t agree with its prophecies 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 fairest 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 recognize 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 pellucidum of Socialism; 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 recognize that if such contracts are made, they should be subject to the constant revision in the interests of the weaker party.” O infatuated conclusion! For it means the robber shall still be allowed to rob, but that some of his steeplings 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 excisemen.” What can come of these two lines 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 it be a Socialist propaganda, principle or not, 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 61 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 Parliament Commission the reports in the daily press met with little more respect from the editors and the public than the pamphlets of which they are the offspring. 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 uncut.