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NOTES ON NEWS.

At the meeting for considering the housing of the poor, Mr. Rowlands said that the present movement in that direction was not "political bird-lime." We may thank Mr. Rowlands for teaching us that word, and go on to say that it would be indeed disgusting if it were; a quite horrible thing to think of, that it should be possible for any set of men to make a false pretence of raising an agitation to house those like men who are now housed worse than dogs! To pretend that you are going to take trouble to make a man happier, when in fact you are only taking trouble to get his vote!

Yet "he who excuses himself accuses himself," says the proverb; and it is clear that Mr. Rowlands thinks that there may be people who would bring this accusation with some show of reason; for "politics" have waded through such seas of mud and blood, that it has become impossible to clean them.

However, though we are forced to allow that there are probably some of those who are setting on foot this matter who are really on the bird-liming business, it would be unfair to assume that of all of them. After all, politics must have hardened a man's heart to stone, if he (being otherwise than a malicious fool) is not disturbed by the thought of a London slum, and would not do something to amend it. Besides, the fact that the political bird-lime is spread on this twig shows that the workers are beginning to think something of their own condition; and that is the first step to their changing it altogether.

It is certainly an indication of the direction in which things are moving that our friend the *Star*, which, once for all, whatever may be its merits or demerits, is the London Radical paper, has this sentence in its leader on the St. James's Hall meeting: "*There is no scheme which the wit of man can devise by which the poor can be made less poor without making the rich less rich.*" This is not Radicalism of ten years ago; not even the five years ago "Socialism plus the Ten Commandments"—which latter some people think were made in the interests of the "property" of the nineteenth century—*i.e.*, to control the poor and leave the rich free. On the contrary, it is a direct attack on private property.

When, however, we get to looking into what it is proposed to do, we Socialists cannot help seeing that the measures proposed are not only timid, but are insufficient also. Sir C. Russell said in his speech that the model (ugh!) lodgings of the Peabody and Waterlow companies were not inhabited by the poor of the working classes, but by those earning large wages (considerably less than Sir Charles "earns," however!), and were let at prices that could not be paid by the ordinary working-man. If that is the case—and I have not seen it denied—then this means that the ordinary working-man cannot pay the market price for tolerably (or not quite tolerable) decent lodgings: so that the least the municipality can do is to see that no lodgings are below that standard of decency, the price for which the ordinary working-man cannot pay: for if any such lower lodgings exist, he will infallibly be driven into them by the force of the action of the market.

But if all lodgings come up to this standard of decency, and the ordinary working-man is able, owing to the action of the municipality, to occupy them, that will mean just this, that the house-rent of the worker will be lowered. "Well," some will say, "a very good thing too." Doubtless, in itself; but please, my friends, note the weight of the chain which binds you. If your house-rent were lowered, you would with your present wages have more to spend on your clothes and food. Therefore, since though there would be a law keeping lodging up to a certain standard of decency, there would be none for keeping wages up to a certain point, your wages would fall under the influence of competition. Paying lower rent you would not need so much wages to buy your food and clothes, and consequently would not get as much; since the pinch of hunger would always force the poorest to undersell the others in the labour-market. This would happen unless you brought some form of compulsion to bear upon your masters,

and forced them to pay you the same wages as before your rents were lowered; and even then they would find some means of evading any agreement you might come to.

For you must understand that you workmen are not paid in proportion to the work you do, but are paid just as little above mere subsistence (or starvation) wages as you will take without rebelling in some way. The natural operation of the labour-market forces you to accept subsistence such as a stingy slave-owner provides for slaves, whose labour can be done by almost any one, and whose places as beasts of burden can be readily supplied when they drop. Whatever any of you have got more than this, you have got, as the *Star* hints to you, by forcing your masters to give back to you some of the plunder they have stolen from you; stolen by means of the very poverty of you, which some of them are even now, hypocritically or ignorantly, deploring.

Some of the plunder you have forced them to give back to you, but how little! And even that little you get from them on the terms that you shall allow a vast number of the workers to be not in the least above that lowest standard of the over-driven underfed horse; to live a life as miserable as that of any slave that the world has yet seen. A life that would be but mere torture to any one who had not been compelled by the habit of his slavery to renounce the hopes and feelings of a man.

It is little indeed that you have forced your masters to yield to you; but you see you can force them to give up something. Put your hands to the task and force them to leave off plundering you altogether! That also can be done when you are determined to do it.

It is good indeed that London slums should be abolished—perhaps on any terms. But if only they could be abolished at the expense of those whose robbery has bred them! These half-measures if they succeed in abolishing them, which they will not, mean abolishing them at the expense of the poor who have suffered and do suffer by them. If this is all democracy can do, let it make haste to melt into Socialism, which alone can destroy poverty and riches, and all the grist of misery which these two mill-stones have ground between them. W. M.

FREE versus STATE COMMUNISM.

SINCE the introduction of the new Local Government Bill by the Tories, and in view of the establishment of the County Council, there are many well-meaning persons whose hopes have been raised by the prospect of this measure. There are also many who point to it as the silencer of the clamorous Free-Communist.

Now, although much might be said to the former set of well-meaning persons, as to their position with respect to this "reform," I intend to deal more particularly with the latter—*i.e.*, those who think that it will form a basis for all that the Anarchist-Communist desires.

This group may be broadly described as Parliamentary Socialists, who have hitherto regarded the State-machine—the House of Commons—as the undeveloped Hercules, which will, when grown sufficiently strong, take the burdens of the country on its strong shoulders and thus relieve us of any further trouble. Again and again have we been told by these people that every modern Act of Parliament, from the first Irish Land Bill to the last Employers' Liability Act, unmistakably indicates the direction whither we are tending. "Our modern civilisation," says Gronlund, "mainly consists in this: that the State—that is, society in its organised form—has been constantly expanding its jurisdiction, and has more and more contracted the sphere of individual ownership and control. Why, nearly everything the State now manages for us was once entrusted to private individuals" ('Co-operative Commonwealth,' p. 94). Gronlund may be considered something of a master of State-Socialism, and there are many, both in this country and in America, who have followed his teaching. "In the fulness of time," according to his dictum, Parliament will take over the land, and all other means of labour, and administer them from the centre in the