

THE COMMONWEAL

The Official Journal of the SOCIALIST LEAGUE.

[REGISTERED FOR TRANSMISSION ABROAD.]

VOL. 5.—No. 182.

SATURDAY, JULY 6, 1889.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

NOTES ON NEWS.

THE police have been playing the usual game, and in all probability with the usual impunity to them and the usual punishment to the "rioters," so called. We shall not be suspected of agreement with the doctrines of the Salvation Army; but on this occasion the processionists must be looked on as citizens going about on their lawful errands and suddenly attacked by a band of organised and armed ruffians without any cause whatever.

Here is again an opportunity for testing the genuineness of the protestations of both parties in the State. Even the Tories might be expected to take up the matter on behalf of persons with no taint of revolutionism in them; and as for the Liberals!—Well, I must say that they are fast qualifying themselves for the name which they used to bestow on their Tory opponents—the Stupid Party. In fact their stupidity is a deep well—to fathom. They haven't even the wits to pick up a safe opportunity like this, but are determined to play into the hands of the "advanced" party, which is advancing in no doubtful way towards Socialism.

Our friend Mr. Cunninghame Graham was probably not particularly disappointed at the adverse vote against him about the instructions to the British delegate to the Berne Conference. To be invited to a Conference and to understand perfectly well what would be the only important subject discussed there, and then to say Yes, we will send delegates, but those delegates shall not take part in the discussion of the real subject which the Conference has been called together to discuss—this would undoubtedly seem to the dispassionate observer from another planet a piece of absurdity impossible to men claiming to hold a dignified and responsible position; but to us living on the Earth under a bureaucratic government, it is a quite familiar incident.

In short, it is *the* position of the Whig-Tory or Tory-Whig governments that we are such fools as to put up with. How could it be otherwise? What would happen if they were to allow the discussion of subjects affecting the welfare of the mass of the population? Clearly the preliminary to the useful discussion of these subjects would be that such governments should take themselves off; and, as it is the business of their lives *not* to go off, from his point of view Mr. Morley was right in declaring the question unpractical, although, as he knows well enough, all thinking workmen throughout civilisation are (rightly or wrongly) crying out for *practical* discussion of this subject of the limitation of the hours of labour.

Yet the position of Lord Salisbury's Government is more logical than Mr. Morley's, who blames them for refusing to discuss the question and then points out that it cannot be discussed; and his arguments against the limitation of labour are of the stale kind which would be quite as effective against the limitation of the working day of women and children as of adult males. In fact in this matter Mr. Morley is not really considering the position of the workers in their factories and workshops, but his own position as a politician in the House of Commons: that is why he is so anxious to ticket himself as a Whig. If the Whigs should be driven at any time to legislate about the working day, we shall find him naively assuming that all liberal-minded men were always in favour of the eight-hour day: just as he assumes that they were always in favour of Home Rule.

Mr. Cunninghame Graham must be thanked for giving the House of Commons and the Liberal party, including their organ the *Daily News*, another opportunity for showing the people how little they have to hope from them; and moreover the question is one that must be discussed, and I repeat will be, in spite of the attempt of the so-called leaders of the trades unions to burk the discussion. For my part I think that "unpractical" as the question is, legislation limiting the working hours of adult males will be forced on the Government, and that before very long.

If that legislation were effective, it would certainly give more leisure to the workers, which of itself would be a great gain whatever came with it, and lower wages for the mass of the workers, the unskilled, could not accompany it, because they are already working for mere subsistence wages. Also the struggle between the masters and the men would be embittered by it, because the masters would try to force down the wages of the skilled or half-skilled workmen, and to give less wages for the eight hours than they now give for the nine, ten, or twelve hours. Competition for profits would force them to do this, and the men of course would be obliged to resist this, so that there would be fresh strikes and fresh discontent throughout the world of labour, which would further our Cause.

On the other hand, the masters would be driven to meet the comparative scarcity of labour by carrying still further and faster the development of machinery and the organisation of labour, which is such a great feature of these days, of the last ten years especially; so that if less labour hours were available, less would be needed. And the improvement in machinery would increase the intensity of labour, so that the amount done in each hour and the consequent wear and tear to the workman would be greater than under the longer working-day. All these would disappoint the hope of those who think that the eight hours day would give more employment to the mass of workers. The system of wage-slavery and the profit-market necessitates "a reserve army of labour," *i.e.*, of a starvation army waiting for the short crisis when it suits the capitalist slave-holders to take on all the hands whom they can sweep up from the workhouse and the street corners; and no shortening of the hours of labour will do away with this wretched state of things that does not bring with it obvious revolution, that is to say a change in the basis of society.

The workers must settle for themselves whether the gain of leisure, which it may be assumed would be the result of a limitation of the day's labour, would so far outweigh these drawbacks as to make it worth their while to carry on the agitation for it vigorously. But they must certainly *settle it for themselves*; if they allow the gentlemen of the House of Commons to settle it for them, they will find as usual that they will have something given them with the right hand to be taken back with the left.

In any case I beg them not to expect too much from the success of such an agitation, and above all not to think that it would relieve them of one scruple's-weight of their duty to struggle for the destruction of our present class-society. Mr. Graham, unconsciously perhaps, gave us a warning on this matter in his speech the other night. He reminded the House that for 24 years the eight hours' day had obtained in Victoria, and said that no harm had come of it. We know from the definite information of our comrades in the antipodes that a revolution is just as necessary there as here; and so it is, and will be all over the world as long as there are privileged classes living on the disinherited classes.

Tennyson's northern farmer heard his cantering horses' hoofs play the tune of "Proputty, Proputty, Proputty!" No wonder; it is the one thought in the mind of all respectable people. Some luckless persons the other day at St. Bees ate a poisoned joint of beef, and one (a lady) died of it, and the others were made very ill. Says the daily press anent this luckless business: "The occurrence is a most unfortunate one, as St. Bees is so popular and Mr. Scott is a new tenant of the hotel." The poor lady's epitaph then must be a moan over the lost "Proputty, proputty, proputty!" W. M.

We are surprised that the editor of *Daylight*, who has often done such good service to the cause of the people, should put on his front page that sentimental lie of some inventive and not too scrupulous journalist, concerning a Russian lady who shot herself in preference to shooting his most gracious Majesty the Czar of Russia. At any rate, if he had put it in, he might have edited it a little. It is funny surely to find the removal of a cruel, bloody, and merciless despot