

Internationalism

Frank Kitz

September 11, 1886

As the references to the starting of various associations in "Socialism from the Root-up" are necessarily brief, I desire as one who took a part in bringing together English and foreign workers, to supplement them. If we select the period immediately subsequent to the death of Robert Owen, we look upon a gloomy phase of working-class history. Remnants of the great Chartist and Socialistic agitations were following upon divergent roads the lead of Bronterre O'Brien and Ernest Jones; the former attacking the evils of landlordism, usury, and profit, and proposing what might be termed a mixture of Individualism and Socialism as a remedy, and the latter seeking through political Parliamentary means to alleviate social ills. Away from these sincere men was a mass of what may be termed the disbanded army of Chartist workers, men who probably were never sincere in their temporary adhesion to the great principles put forward during the previous great agitations, and now sought their own aggrandisement at the expense of the people's Cause. All sorts of middle-class humbug was upheld and preached by these renegades — Thrift, Emigration, National Insurance, and Malthusianism — a host of bogus associations sprang into existence for these several objects, and one or two middle-class saviours of Society became general banker and treasurer to the whole; our old friend Samuel Morley might consider this a personal reference. How these fellows scrambled for the middle-class gold thrown amidst them! How they belittled the great principles which they had formerly professed, and derided the enthusiasm of young men who sought to carry those principles forward, is well known to many who have pioneered the present Socialist revival.

The birth of the International was a gleam of hope for the workers, but even upon that body they intruded their presence; sleek trade unionists, who only believe in a corrupt aristocracy of labour and the "rights of those who can get them," irrespective of those who are entitled to them, joined with the aforesaid middle-class hacks in an hypocritical make-believe of adopting the economic theories of Marx and the principles of universal emancipation. But whilst the English delegates were playing a role, the "foreigners" were in earnest, and the Commune was proclaimed in Paris. It acted as a solvent upon these members of the British Federation, and they hastened to assure their patrons that they had no sympathy with violence, and a few belonging to that curious combination known as the Workmen's Peace Party, chief product of benefactor Morley, went to Paris and wept crocodile's tears over the effigy of the executed Archbishop of Paris, and thus added insult to the injuries endured by the martyr Parisian people in striving to prevent the re-imposition of the shackles of Capitalism. Favourable mention must be made of those members

of the Federation who did honour to the heroism of the Parisian workers, but their enthusiasm could not withstand the dull apathy and hostility of the masses — apathy in a large degree due to the spectacle of apostacy presented to them. Their expiring effort was the formation of a club in 1873, which, however, was short-lived, and the earlier celebrations of the Communist uprising as a consequence were almost confined to foreigners resident in London. The persistent efforts of the London refugees to establish relations with English workmen resulted in a meeting of English, French, and Germans in August, 1877, whereat a resolution was agreed to form an International Club, and a few months saw its inauguration at Rose Street, Soho. I might record that they had previously rendered generous service to the English Trades' Unionists by causing the return of a large number of German masons, who, through the misrepresentation of the employers, were inveigled over here during the famous masons' strike. Their efforts were rewarded by the sometime Internationalist Broadhurst rushing into print to deny that the International had any hand in the business. The passing of the Anti-Socialist Law in Germany crowded the ranks with exiles, and clearly demonstrated the futility of lawful agitation against despotism. The sudden strain of supporting a mass of expatriated men, women, and children was immense, but it was met and overcome. Suffice it to say that outside of the few Englishmen comprising the English section, not one penny of help did we receive. The Englishmen in association with this club now commenced attacks upon the cant and humbug which the enemies of progress were indulging in. Anti-Emigration meetings were held, whereat resolutions were passed denouncing the monopolists and their tactics, and the unemployed were stirred to resist the process of slow starvation. The execution of the Czar, and the prosecution of Most for commenting upon this event in the German *Freiheit*, together with the publication by the English section of a manifesto and English edition of the *Freiheit*, drew general attention to the principles of Socialism, and vastly aided their propagation. In this light we might almost view ex-Home Secretary Harcourt as the putative father of the present marvellous growth of our movement.

The initial meetings of the Social Democratic Federation were held at this revolutionary and by that time Anarchist club, and although it may be very inconsiderate of me to note this fact, as affecting the origin of those who are not only painfully anxious to be considered a “purely English party, “but also as the sole custodians of correct Socialist principles, to whom all others are but their pupils and offshoots,” (*vide Justice*), yet the truth must out. The Germans, having by bitter experience been cured of Parliamentarianism, the New English Party started with it, with what success the logic of events may prove, but there were a few inside and outside of the new party who would not wholly commit themselves to it on account of its Jingo Nationalism, and still preserved their organisation intact, and to these are due the thousands of Socialistic pamphlets, leaflets, and manifestos in circulation over the country, the wherefrom of which has seriously troubled our “masters.”

The foundation of the “Radical,” by S. Bennett, and the efforts of the Anti-Coercion Association to prevent coercion in Ireland, was also contributory to the birth of the “only English Party.” In connection with Gladstone's ill-starred coercive policy, there are one or two facts which show curiously how English opinion is manufactured. Four trusty henchmen met over a friendly glass and determined to go to the aid of the Grand Old Man, and forthwith there was launched into existence the “Radical” League in support of the policy of her Majesty's Government towards Ireland. One of the four, a reporter, under a cloud for reporting an execution that never took place, had to work his “copy” through another hand, and the morning papers contained lengthy reports of the speeches which this precious gang made to one another, and Irishmen were ex-

asperated by what appeared to be an influential combination against them. One of the historic four I see was among the seven who pretended to represent the English working-class at the late International Trades' Congress, and as "a fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind," he, of course, "warmly protested" against the attack made upon his fellow-Coercionist Broadhurst by the German delegate. The game of representation which he and others have played for so many years, and the formation of bogus political associations chiefly around the neighbourhood of Clerkenwell, is now doomed by the advance of Socialism. Whilst in reality they have only represented a narrow clique in a special craft, as another delegate truly told them, the Aristocracy of Labour, they have presumed on all occasions to speak in the name of the great mass of the English workers, a position for which they have as much right to as the man in the moon. To talk of German competition whilst Englishmen are forcing their goods upon millions of people at the point of the bayonet, is like pot calling the kettle black, and is a stupid and mischievous contribution to the discussion of Social Economics.

The toilers and moilers in the sweltering back slums of our cities and towns, who get their hand-to-mouth existence in ways that Burnett and Co. neither wot of nor care about, and even the over-worked unionist who sees his combination powerless to repress the growing power of Capitalism, and only useful in saving the pockets of the exploiters from poor rates, and to increase the cost of living and rent to himself and others, may well question whether the Socialist or the paid Union Delegate best represents the full interest of Labour.

Mr. Burnett's sneer as to the fact of his being able to speak without fear of imprisonment falls flat, for he and his fellows would run no risk of imprisonment, even in despotic Germany, for acting gratuitously as relieving officers for the middle-class. But if, instead of talking cant, he fought the true battle of Labour with Monopoly, he might And himself fined or imprisoned even in "dear" Albion — Mainwaring and Williams to wit. However, he and his confreres have their reward. That slimy product of our modern capitalist system, viz., the anonymous scribbler of the Hebrew Money-jobber Daily Press, belauds them, and this, together with the small jobs which their close friends the Parliamentary Whigs are sure to give them, will constitute a sufficient recompense for the trials and tribulations endured at the Congress.

The German delegates' references to the Conservatism and indifference of the English workers to the root question of whether Labour shall be the slave or the master in Society are particularly true, and whilst we must regret that the present Socialist upheaval is more due to the failure of English Capitalism to still afford wages to its slaves than to spontaneous generous impulse on the part of the workers, we know that the movement now growing will not recede, and that the glorious band of men and women who dreamed dreams of Universal Freedom, and fought and died for their realisation, will receive just recognition by the establishment of an International Federation of the wealth producers. *Frank Kitz.*

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Retrieved on 30th August 2021 from www.marxists.org
Published in *Commonweal*.

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