

The Struggle for Freedom [Sep, 1888]

Freedom Press

September, 1888

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ENGLAND

Already the unemployed are driven into an open manifestation of their misery. During the last fortnight in August they have been meeting in small knots in Hyde Park, and latterly the little groups have begun to swell into considerable meetings, energetically addressed by various Socialist comrades and calling for the fraternal attention of the "moral miracles." No doubt we shall presently hear that "I, Charles Warren," forbid public meetings in the parks as well as the Square and the streets. Meanwhile the metropolitan poor law returns show a higher rate of pauperism than ever, and the trades unions report between 3 and 4 per cent of skilled and organized workers unemployed even in the middle of summer. A continually increasing number of the citizens of London are sinking into a state of permanent distress, and the governing classes, Tory and Liberal, do not know what to do to prevent it. Yet the conviction is growing among "the dregs of the metropolis" that their wretchedness can be prevented, and that the Socialists know how. Wherever two or three unemployed workmen gather together nowadays, there is one among them who is something of a Socialist, and even the vaguest sort of Socialism is a gleam of hope that can give courage to despair. If the Tories carry out their last winter's policy of suppressing public meetings, it is possible that Warren may yet succeed in provoking the revolutionary outbreak from which he believes it his mission to save this country,

The Yarmouth police are setting a spirited example. They are driving the Socialists off the Church Plain, an open space which is used unmolested by teetotalers and the Salvation Army. Comrade Poynts of the Socialist League, has been thrown into prison for speaking at a recent meeting there. The League have for some time been carrying on a most successful propaganda in the eastern counties. Hence the police activity probably.

IRELAND

Before leaving London to enjoy his unearned repose, Salisbury delivered an address, in the usual self-congratulatory style peculiar to Prime Ministers, at a Mansion House banquet to an audience of over-fed city fathers, wherein he made the following surprising assertion: "In respect to Ireland I may confidently claim that we have made great progress and achieved great results. I claim that the present Government has been successful in this that it has diminished the tyranny which illegal associations exercised over their neighbors, that it has increased the sanctity which contracts possessed in their country... From 1st July last year to 1st July of the present year, the number of those who were subjected to that atrocious system, which has been named boycotting, was diminished from 4,800 to 1,300." He shall say nothing of Government statistics, that like a dicky can always be clapped at the shortest notice over the dirtiest shirt, but go on to the Irish eviction and prison record for the month of August and let them speak for themselves.

Evictions have been carried on with the greatest vigor in Clare and Wexford. In the former country they are distinguished for the extreme brutality on the part of the evictors, in the latter they are notable for the determined resistance of the evicted. Not that the Vandeleur tenants have not shown vigor in the defense of their homes for with such simple means as copious discharges of boiling water the fixing of the ram was made in many cases the work of hours. We note with pleasure that Colonel Turner and Cecil Roche got some of the hot water whilst urging on their miserable tools to the work of desolation. These gentlemen have instructed the police

under their command to baton freely on effecting an entrance wherever the slightest resistance is shown, and the manner in which such instructions have been carried out evokes comment from even the Government newspapers in Dublin. The *Daily Express* describes the eviction of an old man named Simon Connell thus: when the police got in they used their batons to such effect that "the resisting party was soon laid prostrate. When brought out old Connell presented *an awful appearance*; he was unconscious, his head covered with blood, and his young son was in a condition almost as bad. Both lay on the ground prostrate for half an hour." Finally the father was conveyed to Kilrush hospital, where he lies in a very dangerous state. The son, after rallying, was conveyed to prison under a strong escort of military.

Cecil Roche during such scenes as this sits on an adjacent wall waiting for the wounded struggling peasant to be dragged handcuffed before him that he may give the order for his committal to jail, whilst Colonel Turner in his capacity of generalissimo of the Clare evictors, gives orders for the workers of the battering ram to stand at ease for amateur photographers to take impressions of the cabin walls as they crumble into picturesqueness.

In this district a piteous story unfolded itself at an inquest held on the body of an old woman, who literally died of grief after the eviction of her family. They had defended themselves as best they could and one son was carried off to jail afterwards. The poor mother distracted with excitement and sorrow took it into her head that her boy had been killed during the attack on their home, and so fretted herself out of this hard world. At the inquest a legal personage was sent down from the Castle to cross-examine the witnesses. However the coroner promptly refused to permit any such impertinence.

All rascaldom, it seems, cannot crush the spirit of these Clare men. Here is Matt Kelly, who has been spending some days in Limerick Jail for daring to help some of the Vandeleur tenants barricade their homes, no sooner out of prison than the folk of Kilduane assemble to do him honor by drawing home a good store of turf and building a fine stone outhouse for him.

The Wexford men have in the matter of scientific defense set an example to all their countrymen. At Coolroe a man named Somers having vainly tried to come to terms with his landlord, a curmudgeon of eighty, prepared to receive bailiffs, etc., in this wise. He and eleven neighbors dug trenches four feet deep about the house and threw up high earthworks. When the attacking-party arrived and tried to set up the ram it was caught from within by strong grappling-irons which rendered it perfectly useless. Emergency-men advanced with scaling ladders, which were no sooner reared than they were shoved down by stout poles and stouter arms. An American gentleman at this crisis came forward and offered to pay down half the rent, but was curtly told by the landlord that he did not permit strangers to interfere with his business. Magistrate Considine then ordered fifty police to charge, with their batons, up the earthworks. This they did repeatedly only to be driven back, most of them wounded. Twenty were then ordered to fix bayonets and charge, and these succeeded in getting upon the roof, through which they plunged their bayonets in order to reach the inmates, but vigorous thrusts from within sent them toppling to the ground one by one. A similar charge by twenty more was also routed. The landlord again asked to come to terms, again declined, saying he wanted his land. At last about 6 p.m. a corner of the house was seen to be on fire and the Redmonds, M.P.s, and Canon Doyle fearing for the safety of Somers and his friends, entreated the inmates to yield, which they did marching out honorably with loud cheers for the Plan of Campaign. Of course they were speedily handcuffed and dispatched to jail, bail being refused. But as William O'Brien pointed out, "every hour's delay at an eviction is an hour gained for a hundred neighbors", for it must be remembered there

are scores of landlords only waiting for the loan of the Government forces to turn out of house and home honest men than themselves.

And not only in fighting, but also in fraternity are the Wexford men well to the fore. On Sunday, Aug. 19th a large meeting assembled at Arklow, in spite of the balfourian weather, to protest against the Carysfort and other evictions going on in their county, and to inaugurate a fund, headed by a check for £100, for the evicted.

Whether it is that the jails are at present full, or the Government is trying some new mean dodge, cannot be clearly made out, but the number imprisoned was very small last month. Eleven cases were dismissed, 18 adjourned, 17 admitted to bail, and 2 sent for appeal. Those more honored in being sentenced were: 4 for intimidation (3 of them boys), retaining possession, 2; obstructing bailiffs, 7; unlawful assembly, 12; assaulting bailiffs and police in home defense, 2; "moral obstruction" of blood tax, 6; trying to prevent collision between police and people at a seizure for blood-tax, 1 (6 months); taking and keeping forcible possession, 1. Thirty-four in all.

Twelve men of Meelin on offering to surrender their bails found that no one was prepared or seemed at all desirous of taking them into custody.

The trial of the Loughrea prisoners has been postponed for another month owing to the quashing of the jury panel, reluctantly done by Judge O'Brien, but the packing was so shameful that even he had to admit the objection of the prisoners' counsel.

"Constabulary duty" includes the offering of bribes to witnesses, so said Removable Beckett on the hearing of the oft-deferred Castlerea conspiracy case. This Removable remands Coercion prisoners for a month because he happens not to be in the vein to hear cases after 12 o'clock mid-day.

Balfour has actually addressed an open-air meeting in Ireland. It took place within the walls of the Constabulary Depot, Phoenix Park, Dublin, his auditors being 400 policemen, mostly recruits, the theme for his eloquence being vague hints of rewards for brutalities past and to come, but no cheering is reported as having followed his remarks. Poor Balfour! He complains bitterly of the criticisms of the press on every little fiddle-faddle of his administration, whilst his predecessors in office did quite as bad if not worse and were unnoticed.

The Lord Chief Baron has been "at it again." This time he actually gave judgment against the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and in favor of one of his tenants. Londonderry claimed £93 rent and the Chief Baron made an order for the payment of £61 odd, which he thought, "fully met the justice of the case."

FRANCE

During the last month Paris was agitated by a strike which at one time threatened to spread into the provinces and to become general. It has failed through sheer lack of funds, but the amount of revolutionary feeling manifested, especially in Paris, promises the outbreak of serious economic disturbances in France before long.

The Municipal Council of Paris pay navies at the rate of 6d. an hour, the other employers, including those engaged in preparing for next year's exhibition to commemorate the Revolution of 1789, pay only 6d. The navies struck for a uniform rate of 6d. an hour; the employers refused to yield. The matter was taken up by the Labor Bureau lately established by the Municipal Council, acting under the influence of the Socialistic Workmen's Party. The Socialists warmly took up the

cause of the strikers, the Labor Bureau became the head-quarters of the strike committee. There was talk of a general strike. The waiters in the coffee houses, who are quite a brotherhood in Paris, took the opportunity to strike against the miserable exploitation to which they are subjected. The hair-dressers assistants demanded the abolition of the registry offices which fleece every man seeking a place by extortionate charges and bribes. Many of the workers engaged in petty trades joined in the agitation. There were street manifestations, quickly turned by the police into street rows all over Paris. The navvies paraded about inciting their comrades to join the strike and overturning the loaded carts of those who refused. The agitation grew and grew and was only checked for want of funds. The Socialists called upon the Municipal Council to vote £500 to support the strike; they refused and the Blanquist party, who had energetically espoused the cause of the strikers, called a public meeting to protest. At that meeting General Eudes, the Blanquist leader fell down dead in the midst of his speech.

Eudes was a popular man in Paris. He had taken part with Blanqui in his attempt to overthrow the Empire in 1870 (L'affaire Villette) and was condemned to death for it, but the people liberated him on the 4th of September. He left his prison to take a prominent part in the Commune the next spring. His funeral accordingly was attended by the workmen of Paris *en masse*, including the strikers whose cause he had been advocating when he died.

The ultra red republican government of Floquet prepared for this popular demonstration by sending for the country gens d'armes (sort of unmounted constabulary carrying rifles and bayonets, and as insolent as their Irish compeers) and ordering the police to make free use of their swords and revolvers. Of course a disturbance ensued, the police charged the people with drawn swords, some fired upwards of 60 persons men, women and children, were wounded, among them a mother with a baby in her arms, and some boys. The police of the XI Arrondissement, who had evidently celebrated the occasion by over copious drafts of wine and absinthe, distinguished themselves by charging a woman with a perambulator! In fact, the moral miracles of Paris contrived to outdo their brethren of Trafalgar Square celebrity, and even the middle class press agree in calling their exploits a butchery. Many harmless and innocent persons were of course arrested and some of them made scapegoats of law and order in the manner to which London police-magistrates have so well accustomed us.

During the "riots" one noteworthy circumstance occurred. A tin of something unpleasant supposed to be a dynamite bomb which did not explode, was thrown among the police, by an unknown hand.

La Révolte remarks, "If it were a bomb or not, and if the bomb was thrown by the hands of a police agent, an anarchist, or some other revolutionist, we do not know and we do not care. Only if it is the Prefecture of Police which has taken into its head to have a sham bomb thrown into a crowd of policemen to sanction its own brutalities, it seems to us to be employing means very dangerous to itself and undertaking the task of teaching its adversaries what tactics to employ against itself. Every one could, like ourselves, read in the evening papers the dramatic story of the bomb thrown into a narrow space where a hundred constables were crowded together, and think as we thought, What damage would it have done had it exploded? Then further reflections, according to the degree of one's sympathy with the defenders of capital. More than one must have asked himself if, supposing a dozen of such toys were to explode during a police charge, it would not be enough to cause those not left on the pavement to turn tail and to take from them the desire to be saddled with any more such dirty jobs as that they had been engaged in."

Since the above was written two bombs have exploded in Paris, about which the police profess to be utterly in the dark. One did some damage to the basement of one of the obnoxious registry offices.

Considerable strikes have taken place in the provinces, especially at Lyons, Amiens and Calais. At the last place the workmen, among whom were our comrades Masson and Sauvage, showed fight when the police attempted to interfere with their street manifestations. Masson struck down the officer who tried to arrest him and succeeded in making good his escape from "justice."

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Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Socialism, Vol. 2, No. 24, online source RevoltLib.com,
retrieved on May 8, 2020.
Freedom Press (ed.)

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