

#120 1911

The Houndsditch Tragedy and Anarchism.

A FEW WORDS TO THE PEOPLE.

The murder of three policemen in Houndsditch by burglars, and the siege in Sidney Street, have led to such an outburst against Anarchism and Anarchists, that we think it desirable to give some explanation of what Anarchism really means. But before doing so we will say a few words on the Houndsditch affair.

In the first place, we protest most emphatically against the lies in the press suggesting that aliens are criminals. This country has almost the lowest percentage of aliens of any of the great industrial nations, and they come here for the same reason as Britishers go to other countries—because they wish to earn a living, and are no more criminal than the people of these islands. No nation has sent forth more of its own people as aliens over the world than Great Britain.

Secondly, hundreds of burglaries take place yearly in this country, and this one only differed from the others because the burglars were foreigners and used firearms. No evidence has been forthcoming as to the political opinions of the persons engaged in the crime, except that they were probably revolutionists from the Baltic provinces of Russia. But almost at once the press took up the cry of "Anarchists!" and since then have done everything possible to make out that Anarchists are nothing but a lot of murderers and thieves. If half that the papers said about us were true, then some special form of torture for us should be invented to meet the case. But these sensational stories were simply invented to sell the papers—and also their readers.

Even if some of the people concerned were Anarchists, it would not prove that they were burglars because they were Anarchists, any more than that the Leicester Sunday School

teacher was a burglar because he was a Christian, or Crippen a murderer because he was a Roman Catholic. In our prisons to-day there are thousands of men and women whose religion is entered as Church of England, Roman Catholic, Methodist, or whatever other sect they belong to; but nobody suggests that their religion was the cause of their criminal actions, and therefore that priests and churches should be suppressed.

Then, why this attack on those holding Anarchist ideas? Because the ruling classes of the world know that when the people understand the real meaning of Anarchism, all their privileges and power will vanish. They know that every day the Anarchist movement grows stronger, and that unless a great effort is made to stop it now, it will speedily sweep away all kings and governments, and with them will go the swarms of soldiers, lawyers, priests, and others who support them with force, fraud, and superstition. The execution of the Chicago Anarchists in America, of Ferrer in Spain, and of Dr. Kotoku and his eleven comrades in Japan, shows how far Governments will go in their attempt to stop Anarchist ideas from reaching the workers. All the lies which have appeared during the last few weeks are part of the campaign to blacken the character of Anarchists so that the public will not interfere if the authorities adopt repressive measures in the future.

To read the papers recently, one would think that human life was a very sacred thing to the ruling classes of this country, and that their hearts were broken because three policemen had been killed. What hypocrites! When have they hesitated to shed blood if their interests were at stake. The Crimean War cost thousands of lives, yet a Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, said cynically that on that occasion "we put our money on the wrong horse." The loss of life was nothing to him. During the Boer War, when the soldiers and the women and children in the concentration camps were dying in thousands, Joseph Chamberlain said: "The suffering is immaterial." Of course, the gold mines were the only things worth considering.

Besides war, think of the waste of human life in the mines and on the railways of this country. But the London papers were so taken up with their sensational articles on the Houndsditch case, that they almost ignored the terrible explosion at the Bolton colliery, which killed 350 men and boys, a tragedy due to the criminal neglect of the warnings of danger which were issued several days previously. Colliery explosions, however, happen so often that newspaper editors devote very little space to them. But if the miners go on strike to force a few extra pence a day from wealthy colliery proprietors, then the papers are full of it, and police and soldiers are drafted into the district to overawe the strikers and protect the property of the mine-owners; and royalty sends touching telegrams inquiring about

the health of the pit ponies. Men, women, and children may starve, but not pit ponies!

Amongst other crimes with which we have been charged is that of expropriation. Well, our rulers should be good judges of expropriation! Do you know that between the years 1760 and 1849 they passed Acts of Parliament by which they stole (they called it "enclosing") 7,350,000 acres of common land from the people? Do you know that more than half the area of the United Kingdom is owned by only 2,500 people? Do you know that this private ownership of the source of the means of life is the main cause of all our poverty, misery, and disease? Those of us who are allowed to work have to pay toll to these monopolists, and the toll we pay, roughly speaking, is all we produce except so much as is sufficient to keep us alive to produce more wealth for our taskmasters. Expropriation!

Well, you will say, what do the Anarchists propose as a remedy? We propose that the people shall retake possession of the land which has been stolen from them, and that they pay neither tax nor toll to any one. Unless we have free access to the land, we cannot be a free people. And, with the land, we will also take possession of everything on the land, and use it for the benefit of all instead of for a few. No longer will we build palaces and live in slums, no longer make fine clothes and wear rags, no longer provide luxuries for others while our children cry for food. All who are able and willing to work shall share freely in the good things of life; and when each one takes his or her part in the work, with the help of our present machinery and that which the inventive genius of the people will produce, a few hours each a week is all the toil that will be necessary to produce enough and to spare for all.

But can we grow enough food in this country for all of us? Certainly. As Kropotkin has written: "If the soil of England were cultivated as is the soil in Belgium, we could grow food for 37,000,000 inhabitants. If it were cultivated as it is at present on the best farms in this country, in Lombardy, and in Flanders, we should be able to feed 80,000,000 people."

But how do Anarchists propose to bring this change about? As the word "An-archy" (no-government) implies, we do not trust in Government, which is simply an executive committee of the great landlords and capitalists. They may give us a few sops at times, such as Eight-hour Acts (which don't act) and old-age pensions at an age when most workers are dead and buried (giving 5s. a week to the pensioners and taking £100 a week themselves); but anything that is likely to put a stop to their robbery will be opposed by them tooth-and-nail. No; Governments must always govern, whether they are Liberal, Tory, or Socialist Governments. The basis of Anarchism is equality, and there can be no equality between those who govern

and those who are governed. Therefore, we must rely on ourselves. But first of all we must understand that it is our freedom we desire, freedom to live, to work, to love; and then, as the poet Cowper said—

“Slaves that once conceive the glowing thought
Of freedom, in that hope itself possess
All that the contest calls for; spirit, strength,
The scorn of danger, and united hearts;
The surest presage of the good they seek.”

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