

THE RED FLAG

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FIVE CENTS

The Meaning of Peterloo

Saturday, August 16, in England, was held the centenary of the Massacre of Peterloo. The years following the battle of Waterloo were desperate ones for the workers of England. In their extremity they resorted to peaceful demonstrations in order to awaken the ruling class to their condition. Outside the city of Manchester, one of these demonstrations was held. It is estimated some 100 thousand workers were assembled. They had come from all parts of the factory districts of the north, bringing their wives and children with them. A totally unarmed and peaceful meeting of protest, it met with the usual remedy a panic-stricken ruling class have for protesting slaves. Hundreds of people were killed and wounded. Through this huge helpless gathering of half-starved factory operatives and their children rode back and forth the charging cavalry, until nothing remained on the field but the dead and the wounded. We take the following from the Manchester Guardian of August 22, setting forth the methods the ruling class of that day employed for solving England's problem. It will be noted how closely sometimes history repeats itself:

The teaching of history has always tended to emphasize the wars which the poor have levied against the rich; it has been inclined to pay less attention to the wars that the rich have levied against the poor. A century ago such a war was in brisk progress in England, and nowhere was it carried on with less scruple or mercy than in Lancashire. Peterloo was the most dramatic symbol of that war, and therefore it came to stand, in the imagination not merely of the poor but of the minority of comfortable and educated people who resented such proceedings, for all the abuses and injustices that were associated with the ancient regime in England.

Lord Robert Cecil had a good phrase the other day about people who wanted to perpetuate the war mind. The Peterloo massacre occurred four years after the conclusion of the war with Napoleon. But in the mind of the governing class of England the war with Napoleon was only part of the general struggle against all the forces and desires represented by the French Revolution. These forces and desires were present in England as they had been in France. Hence the war mind was perpetual. If a man had found himself in Bolton or Oldham in 1813 or in 1819 he would have found himself in a district under military occupation, governed by magistrates who spoke in their letters to the Home Office of the mass of the people of those towns as if they were admittedly a hostile population. These magistrates employed spies, and spies of the most scandalous character, and they were not ashamed of obtaining a conviction on the sole testimony of men whom they knew to be untrustworthy. They were able to lock up men and women under the Vagrancy Acts, and they used this power freely. The Combination Acts made it impossible for a workman to take a single step to improve his position without the risk of prosecution and by using the Combination Acts against the workmen and allowing the employers

to combine openly whenever they liked the magistrates were able to put the great mass of the workpeople entirely under the power of their masters. It is only from a study of the Home Office papers of the period that we can learn how mercilessly the ruling authorities made war on the general body of the Lancashire workpeople a century ago. The title justice of the peace as applied to men like Fletcher, of Bolton, or Parson Hay, of Rochdale, is a superb piece of irony. They had less care for justice or for peace than generals like Byng or Grey, who commanded the troops in the industrial districts, and were often scandalized by their tone.

In this respect there is an interesting difference between Lancashire and Yorkshire. The social problem created by the industrial revolution was in some senses more acute in Lancashire than in Yorkshire. For misery on a great scale we must look first to the cotton weavers. It was the cotton weavers, keeping themselves alive by the work of their wives and their babies in the mill, who supplied the great permanent mass of poverty in the Lancashire towns. With the help from time to time of enlightened employers like Ashworth, of Bolton, or the great John Fielden, of Todmorden, the weavers tried to persuade Parliament to give them a minimum wage. They failed, and their sufferings form the chief element in the picture of wretchedness and degradation that Lancashire presented. The introduction of special machines brought to ruin particular classes of workpeople in Yorkshire, such as the shearmen or croppers whose attack on Cartwright's mill at Liversedge is described in "Shirley," or the woolcombers, whose terrible fate lends a tragedy to the history of Bradford in the late twenties. But if we take the effects on the whole mass of workpeople, the industrial revolution was more catastrophic in Lancashire than in Yorkshire. The woollen industry passed much more gradually than the cotton industry into the mill.

The industrial problem, then, was less acute in Yorkshire. But that fact is not the complete explanation of the difference in the two counties. In Yorkshire, as in Lancashire, the new capitalists were often hard men, and the magistrates were severe and not less hostile to trade unions and reformers than their fellow justices in Lancashire. But the practice of employing spies never took root in Yorkshire as it did in Lancashire.

But of course it would not be fair to throw all the blame for the state of Lancashire on the magistrates. The chief culprits were the ministers. Within the limits of their policy the social problems created by the industrial revolution were insoluble. More than once leading Lancashire manufacturers were in favor of measures of reform, including a minimum wage for weavers and a reduction of the children's hours in the mill. Some of these proposals were supported by individual magistrates. But the ministers of the day were hostile. They hated and dreaded reform. They would not allow Manchester to send a representative to a House of Commons in which Old Sarum had two seats, and they were quite satisfied that

PRITCHARD AND JOHNS TO ADDRESS MEETINGS AT THE COAST

COMRADES W. A. Pritchard and R. Johns, lately released on bail from Stoney Mountain penitentiary, where they were awaiting trial at the Azzises in October, are now in Vancouver. They will address meetings and will explain the situation in regards to their trial for seditious conspiracy. They have also first-hand information on the situation as it stood in Winnipeg and the East during the late strike and afterwards. On Sunday night they will address the S. P. of C. meeting in the Empress Theatre. On the night of Wednesday, Sept. 24, a mass meeting will be held in the Arena. All comrades should do their utmost to pass around the news of the latter meeting and so make it a success. During the interval before the trial they will address as many meetings as possible in order to correct, on certain matters, the erroneous ideas which have been industriously circulated by the capitalist press.

A WINNIPEG RESOLUTION

"That we the Soldiers and Sailors Labor Party, view with apprehension the abrogation of those principles for which we fought, and hereby call upon the Government of Canada to disassociate itself from the system of Prussianization that is being foisted upon the people of Canada by dropping the charges arising out of the Winnipeg strike, also rescinding the abnoxious amendment to the Immigration Act.

"Whereas we have seen through the public press of this city that the chairman, Judge Robson, of the commission empowered to investigate the cause and effect of the recent strike in Winnipeg, has seen fit whilst those spokesmen are kept in jail, and referred to them as rascals that therefore be it resolved that we in meeting assembled go on record as requesting Judge Robson to withdraw his statements through the public press and furthermore, be it resolved that we petition the Provincial Government to withdraw this commission as it can fill no useful purpose."

The above two resolutions were passed unanimously by the above mentioned party, September 11, 1919, at their general meeting.

Yours truly,

JAS. Grant, Secretary,

Room 2, Jordan Block, Fort Street,
Winnipeg, Man.

a town with over a hundred thousand inhabitants should be under the same feudal government as a village. All this time there were men in Parliament trying to reform the worst abuses—the institution of blood money (Nadin, the Deputy Constable for Manchester at the time of Peterloo, made a fortune out of his office,) the use of spies, the arbitrary powers of the magistrates, the general cruelty and unfairness of the law,—and they

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