

## THE WALSALL ANARCHISTS: THE AMNESTY AGITATION.

On Wednesday, 22nd April, a largely attended public meeting was held at South Place Institute, Finsbury, E.C., for the purpose of continuing the agitation in favour of an amnesty being granted to the imprisoned Walsall Anarchists, Charles, Battola, and Cailes.

J. C. Kenworthy, of the Croydon Labour Church, occupied the chair, and on the platform were J. Burgess, Keir Hardy, Tom Mann, Amy Morant, Caroline Martyn, and D. J. Nicoll (hon. sec. of the Walsall Amnesty Committee); while among the audience were Hunter Watts, W. Wess, Caplan, Charlotte Roche, and many connected with the Socialist and Anarchist metropolitan groups.

D. J. Nicoll read the following letters:

From Walter Crane—I have been so much occupied I have not been able to send you an earlier reply. I did not hold out any hopes of being able to attend your meeting for the release of the prisoners; my hands are so full of my work so much overdue that I must not think of any more public speaking at present. I sympathise with your object, of course, and think the Walsall men were the victims of a detestable plot. At the same time I cannot help feeling that Anarchists have prejudiced the majority of people against them and their views by having anything to do with explosives, which must necessarily lead to unsocial action, whether used as a means of protest or propaganda, and therefore must weaken the position of those who protest against any kind of coercion or unsocial action. The letters, which I return, certainly do not indicate that there is much hope at present. Mr. Wilson says, "one has been released" (?) I enclose a contribution as promised, to help your efforts to obtain the release of the prisoners.

From William Morris—I wish your meeting may be successful in influencing public opinion and the government towards the release of the prisoners, whose sentence was admitted at the time by every one to be a very severe one, and who have already surely been punished more than enough for a boyish piece of extravagance, which need never have been taken seriously.

From Michael Davitt—I am sorry I will not be able to attend the proposed amnesty meeting on the 22nd., owing to engagements which stand in the way. I am in hearty sympathy with the movement for the release of the so-called "Anarchist" prisoners. Their sentences were an outrage upon justice and a disgrace to the administration of the law. It was an instance of legal vengeance, and not of fair or impartial justice. We have only been too familiar with brutal sentences of this kind in Ireland in the recent past, and it is only one of the many bad effects of the English system of misgoverning Ireland that the judicial vindictiveness, so peculiar to our country, should be creeping into the courts of England in political trials. Six months' imprisonment ought to have satisfied impartial justice in the case of the Walsall prisoners.

From G. Bernard Shaw—On considering the matter, I think the meeting at South Place is likely to do as much or more harm than good. The only chance of getting Charles out, is to manage the matter quietly, by working on such sense of shame as may exist at the Home Office for what they must know to be a successful booby-trap, set by the police, rather than a serious conspiracy. A meeting at which a good many foolish things are likely to be said will not help matters—quite the contrary. Very likely the resolution submitted to the meeting will be as mischievous in its terms as the petitions which I have been asked to sign, which were enough to destroy any man's chance of getting out before his time. On the whole, therefore, I prefer Carpenter's plan of pegging away quietly at the Home Office to holding meetings.

[The above was received with significant silence by most of the audience; a few however expressed disapproval by hissing.]

From Thos. M. Watt—There is no likelihood of my being in

town on April 22nd. . . I would have gone thrice as far to show up the accursed police conspiracy. I have no hope of justice from a cowardly government, in the case of its avowed enemies, when one can win no consideration of the social crime inflicted by its agents in our name upon the unhappy Florence Maybrick. I have learnt to despise and loathe our governors, and to hate their methods and their agents like hell. Yet, after all, it is the mass of recreants that submit their own necks peacefully to their rulers heels, that are mainly responsible for the continuance of both oppression and oppressors. I wish you success, but dare not venture to hope for it.

The Chairman said his object in being present on that occasion was to speak on behalf of three men who were suffering most unjust punishment, in consequence of having been falsely convicted of a crime they had not committed. Charles and the others had simply been trapped by a police agent into a technical violation of the law, and the law became in their case an instrument of oppression.

Joseph Burgess referred to the evidence given at the trial of the Walsall Anarchists, and called special attention to the admissions made by Inspector Melville as to his knowledge of Coulon, and the reluctance with which he gave any details of his acquaintance and transactions with that despicable police agent and spy.

Keir Hardy said he was pleased to be there in order to support the demand for the release of the Walsall men. He had met Charles, and also Deakin, at the International Socialist Congress, held in Paris—he had stayed at the same hotel with them, and had had an ample opportunity of judging them. He had found them good, gentle, and kindly in manner, and almost ethereal in their character, and he had come to the conclusion that if the so-called violent Anarchists were all men of that description he would like to see more of them. He had been told on good authority that Coulon had shown the sketch of the bomb to the authorities of Scotland Yard for their approval before being sent to Walsall. If the use of bombs by Anarchists was a crime, what was the butchery of the Matabele by dynamite? The natives of Africa were only trying to be free to live their own natural life. Why, he would ask, did people raise their voice against Anarchists, and at the same time leave the crimes of the rich uncensured? If the Walsall prisoners were to be released, the agitation would have to be kept up and increased. The doors of Irish prisons were being slowly opened, and political prisoners set at liberty, mainly because the Irish people carried on a lively and persistent agitation, and similar means would have to be adopted on behalf of the imprisoned Walsall Anarchists.

Miss Caroline Martyn having made an appeal for funds to carry on the agitation, and having intimated that another large public meeting would shortly be held,

Tom Mann pleaded earnestly on behalf of the prisoners. In his opinion something more than a mere protest against the injustice of their sentences was necessary. They must not be indifferent to the economic slavery which the Walsall men had fought against, and for their opposition to which they were now suffering incarceration. Unfortunately the curse of any such movement as that they were engaged in was the apathy that prevailed. Whatever might be said about the bomb thrower, he at least did something, and it was to be remembered that such men entertained the idea when using explosives that they were striking a blow for freedom. He (the speaker) liked men and women with some pluck in them—people who would not go about bowing and cringing, and afraid to speak in case they should offend their political friends. He hoped meetings like that would be repeated, and the agitation earnestly and actively continued. He would willingly do all he could to assist in obtaining the release of the prisoners.

Miss Amy Morant having spoken,

A resolution calling for the immediate release of Charles, Cailes, and Battola was unanimously adopted.

During the evening the "Clarion" Choir sang several appropriate pieces.