

# PLEBS

JULY 1927

FOURPENCE

GIFT  
AUG 1 1927

*The ideal  
Trade  
Unionist*

*(with acknowledgments  
to Robert Minor)*



J.F.H.

I was struck by the similarity of the cover art on this July 1926 issue of *The Plebs* (a British communist publication) to the famous back cover cartoon by Robert Minor on the July 1916 issue of the famous USA socialist / communist literary and arts magazine, *The Masses*.

I decided to include a high quality scan I made of that famous Robert Minor cartoon (from an original issue of *The Masses*, that I own) so one can appreciate how one artist "borrows from " / "is inspired by" the work of another in the world of socialist / communist political cartoons.

Here is the scan of that back cover of *The Masses*, on the page that follows this.

---marty

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# THE PLEBS

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of Labour Colleges*

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# The Pleb Point of View



**T**HE ballot of members of the Plebs League on the question of the taking over of all publications, including this magazine, by the N.C.L.C. has resulted in a verdict of more than 20 to 1 in favour of the proposal. It is a matter for gratification to those of us on both sides who were entrusted with the negotiations that the League Executive's recommendations should have been endorsed so emphatically by the League membership.

\* \* \* \*

So that we are passing—or shall soon be passing—another milestone in the history of our movement. Six years ago, when the National Council of Labour Colleges was founded, the Plebs League, till then the only national body standing for Independent Working Class Education, handed over the organising and running of classes to the newly-formed National Council. Since that time, as all our readers know, the main business of the League has been the publication of textbooks, pamphlets, and this magazine, for the use of students. In addition, groups of League members in various localities have been active as I.W.C.E. propagandists, or have formed discussion circles in which any and every question affecting the Labour Movement could be thrashed out in the light of the "first principles" taught in our classes.

\* \* \* \*

It is on these last two activities that the League will concentrate in the future. For we are singing no swan-song. The Plebs League will go on, and it will, we hope and believe, be quite as much a force in our movement as it has — *but the* PLEBS goes on! ever been in the past. A very considerable part of the work of the movement, depending as it does on Trade Union support and carried on under Trade Union auspices, must be carried on by officials. We need an organisation of rank-and-filers; an organisation through which rank-and-filers can make their point of view heard, and which also will make it possible for the hundreds of keen I.W.C.Ers whose time is in the main devoted to other branches of Labour activity, to "keep contact" with our educational work. The League Executive is putting forward certain definite proposals to the Annual Meet, and these will be discussed in our pages next month.

Several letters received along with the ballot-papers stressed one particular point—the hope of the writers that this magazine would remain the same kind of “open forum” it has hitherto been, and not become simply an “official organ,” in the more dreadful sense of that term. On that point we wish to say quite clearly that those of us who have hitherto been associated with the PLEBS side of our movement, particularly with the magazine, are as keen in this matter as any of our friends. Not only because we want free and vigorous discussion in these pages, but also because we want our movement to grow, do we feel strongly that THE PLEBS shall not become a mere official record. A magazine of interest to all sections of class-conscious workers wins new supporters for Independent Working Class Education; while one which concerned itself solely with educational work, in the narrower sense, would appeal to no-one but those already converted. We believe that those of our comrades who fill official positions in the N.C.L.C. agree with us in this. And while we shall certainly do our best to introduce any new features likely to improve the magazine, we can promise all our friends that its general character will be the same as hitherto. Will they, in their turn, help us by getting new readers?

## *Straws in the Wind*

### CHINA, RUSSIA AND BRITAIN

**L**AST month in this column it was stated that Britain, China and Russia were the three crucial sectors of the class struggle at present. Since that statement was written important events have occurred on all these sectors of the front. In China the anti-Imperialist forces have made a further sweeping advance northward, and will soon be at the gates of Peking. The Hankow Government has greatly strengthened its position, thereby vindicating the claim of the Chinese Communists that the basis of the nationalist movement must lie in the mass organisation of the workers and peasants. In respect to Russia, we have seen the breaking-off of trade and diplomatic relations by British capitalism, as a prelude to a fresh wave of counter-revolutionary activities against the Soviet power. In Britain we have seen the British capitalists pushing through the T.U. Bill to its final stage and “snapping their fingers” at the pious speeches, resolutions of protest and all the impotent “campaign,” conceived in the best liberal pre-war traditions, of the official Labour movement. We have seen new legislation to “reform” the House of Lords, so as

to make it an effective barrier against Socialist legislation, destroying the last vestige of hope that capitalism can ever be overthrown by constitutional Parliamentary means. Meanwhile, the position in the coal industry worsens; engineering approaches a new crisis; the "trade revival" trumpeted at the outset of the year seems as far off as ever.

These events are extremely significant; and it is of first importance that our educational work should be moulded so as to throw into relief their interconnection and their meaning. For those who have ears to hear they cry aloud the real tendencies of the new phase of the class struggle—struggle against capitalism in decline. This struggle can no longer be treated in the old sectional terms, but must be thought of on a world scale. In this phase the revolt of the exploited colonial peoples is proving the "Achilles' heel" of capitalism. British capitalism in particular is fast losing its power to buttress its position, and to bribe the workers with "reforms" by means of the "super-profits" wrung from colonial trade and investment. To beat back the growing revolt of its slaves, both at home and in the colonies, it has to turn to Mussolini-methods. That the era of peaceful Reformist progress is at an end, and that we face the era of Fascist oppression (operated, maybe, "constitutionally" through the capitalist State)—that is the real lesson we have to learn. But while this is so, the Reformist leaders still continue to control our movement, blinding us with the illusion that Reformist methods are still possible, and expelling from the movement all who fight for changed methods of struggle to suit changed conditions.

In this month's issue we bring together several articles which give us important food for thought on the problems of this new phase. Robert Dunn shows the methods by which U.S.A. capitalism, still in its ascending stage, bribes sections of the workers (and even the T.U. leadership) to draw them off from the class struggle. L.W., author of the Plebs pamphlet on *Fascism*, analyses the most recent developments in Italy. When the T.U. Bill is law, our own position will have many points of similarity with that of the Italian workers. The Secretary of the N.C.L.C. submits important proposals for combatting the propaganda which the capitalists exert through the educational machine; while Philips Price continues the discussion on Eastman's recent criticism of Marxism, and the Editor of the *American Modern Quarterly* analyses from a Marxian standpoint recent tendencies in American literature.

ZED.

## COMPANY UNIONISM in U.S.A.

*At the time when British capitalists are preaching "industrial peace" on the one hand, and trying to shackle trade unions on the other, this account of how they do it in America is particularly significant.*

**T**HERE are many tendencies in the United States working toward the "popularisation" of capitalism in the minds of the workers, more than 80 per cent. of whom are not yet organised in trade unions. The vast range of welfare and personnel devices introduced by corporation managements includes employee stock ownership, group insurance, company pensions, employee magazines, mutual benefit associations and hundreds of other types of associations and clubs. All of these "benefits" are given by managements without the compulsion of law or trade union agreement. They are definite gratuities provided for the workers in order to decrease labour turnover, develop goodwill, smother discontent, create "friendly contacts" between "men and management," increase "loyalty" and head-off labour unionism. Foremost among these devices stands the company union.

By "company union" is meant all sorts of shop committees, works councils, conference boards and "employee representation plans," initiated and controlled by management, and providing the workers with some machinery for taking up at least a few of the minor grievances arising in the plant. Some companies, like the International Harvester Co., have as many as twenty plants working under these non-trade union "industrial councils." Others are comparatively small and include but a few hundred workers in one plant. But the great majority of the more than 800 company unions in the country are in large and well-known corporations employing over 15,000 workers.

All of these company unions, in which there are now over a million workers represented, have, with one or two exceptions, developed since the World War. The various government boards created to meet war-time labour "emergencies" helped to build up the "shop committee" idea in the minds of the company executives. The latter learned that these committees, installed in many plants during the war, were a very satisfactory way to manipulate the human element and keep it more under the control of management and less amenable to the appeals of the "outside" trade unions. The result has been that the company unions have gained approximately as many members since the war as the trade unions have lost. On the railroad lines, particularly, the company unions have made direct gains in trade union territory and have lined up nearly

400,000 rail workers, the great majority of whom were, in the years after the war and up to the shopmen's strike of 1922, members of the regular trade unions.

The employers' objectives underlying company unions are usually well concealed behind phrases that carry the halo of idealism. The professional personnel managers and industrial relations experts who hold down \$10,000 to \$80,000 a year jobs with the corporations have a vocabulary all their own with which they easily hypnotise the unorganised workers. "Co-operation in management," "the spiritual integration of men and management," and a great deal about the Big Team or the Big Family Relationship, comes from the lips of these gentlemen; and their publicity assistants broadcast their talks on "service" and the "new leadership in industry" to the far corners of the continent.

Underneath these pretty words one finds solid motives based on the technological requirements of management as well as on a realisation of the inherent class-struggle potentialities even in unorganised American industry. Confidentially the employer's agent will tell you that the primary reason for the company union is to "prevent the growth of trade unionism," to "check unrest and strike talk," to "tame the radicals," to "keep out the union agitators," and to "forestall Bolshevik talk."

When the company union "representatives" are not engaged in discussing such trivial matters as athletics, dances and other recreations, benefit societies, pensions, ventilation, safety rules, production costs, etc., they may be listening to some high official of the corporation addressing them on a political or economic question—stuffing the workers with all the prejudices of the capitalists. An example from the "industrial council" minutes of the International Harvester Co. is illustrative. Mr. Cyrus McCormack, jun., one of the heads of the company, proceeds to tell his puppets that :

"I had the pleasure of being in England this last spring, just after the famous general strike was over, and it nearly broke one's heart to see that wonderful country, the country that gave constitutional government to the world, sliding down hill, for one reason and one only—because they had permitted to grow in the vitals of their organisation the cancer of class warfare—because they had lost sight of the absolute economic truth that there is no fundamental difference between capital and labour."

After this tear for Britain, the learned millionaire McCormack continues to define "the real job of the Employee Representative"—the company union delegate.

"It is to preach that mutual understanding. . . In that way we are going to keep class warfare out of this country. We are going to eliminate any chance of having a general strike, and because we can't go along separately, all of us are going to team together for the benefit of each one of us."

A considerable number of well-meaning American Liberals whose chief contact with the company unions has been through their paper

plans, by-laws, and constitutions, are enthusiastic for these "partnership-in-industry experiments." They see them as the first step toward "industrial democracy." But the candid representatives of management will tell you that the company union is useful chiefly as a propaganda device to keep the workers satisfied with their lot and to keep their minds concentrated on non-essentials. In fact the company unions are the most effective devices for "selling" the worker all sorts of welfare schemes and for making him believe that only through the company association could he have secured these handouts.

The trade union argument against the company union is familiar to all those who have followed American labour journals. It has been appearing now since 1919, when through the influence of William Z. Foster, the leader of the great steel strike, a resolution against the company unions was introduced in a convention of the American Federation of Labour. Briefly, labour contends that : (1) The company union has no bargaining power or economic power of any kind. (2) It has no dues, funds or treasury of any kind. (3) The workers under company unions are permitted no independent outside advisers or counsel to represent them in negotiations. At the same time the companies employ expert and expensive economists and lawyers to represent them and to prepare their statistics for the bargaining councils. (4) The workers are not permitted affiliations with outside national unions ; while the employers themselves affiliate with national employers' associations and industrial associations expressly organised to fight labour unions. (5) The company unions often employ "yellow dog" or individual agreements to tie the workers to the firm, and make affiliation to a union the cause for immediate discharge from the job. (6) The company unions are "educational agencies" for instilling anti-union ideas and employers' economic notions and political ideals into the minds of the workers.

There are also a dozen charges made against the company unions based upon their inherent hypocrisies : (1) The workers are permitted no separate meetings, either for their delegates or for the rank and file. They simply cast a ballot for a "representative" who goes uninstructed by the workers into a joint conference with the appointed representatives of management. (2) Elections are sometimes crooked, and delegates are often bribed by management. (3) The scope of the questions to be discussed in the conference is limited to innocuous and unimportant matters. (4) Most plans are purely advisory or consultatory. The workers' committees may decide any way they care to. *The final "say" rests with the company.* Even arbitration with so-called neutral outsiders is usually prohibited ; and when it is included in the plan, it usually calls for some capitalist politician, like a wealthy Secretary of Labour, to act as the arbitrator.

All of these points have been made by labour—and still others. The reactionary labour officials, who are nothing more than the spokesmen of American imperialism—Matthew Woll, the notorious Civic Federationist, now busy expelling Communists from the trade union, is a good example—believe that the company union has certain other dangerous potentialities. As these Councils are “industrial” in form and, unlike most American trade unions, take in all workers in the plant irrespective of craft, sex, race, skill or colour, they are likely to develop certain irresponsible traits. In an industrial crisis they might conceivably—and with plenty of left-wing agitation—become real industrial unions menacing to the trade union bureaucracy. The employers, Woll thinks, ought to recognise the danger of this sort of union. This warning of the reactionaries, in the opinion of the writer, is entirely gratuitous. The big corporations will see to it that the company unions do not get out of hand. Woll’s apprehensions are entirely fanciful—the product of his Redphobia and his fear of the great army of the unorganised that some day may be drawn into the real unions in such numbers that the chief of the photo engravers, Mr. Woll, will lose his job as official heresy-hunter for the A.F. of L.

Such trade unions leaders as William Green, while making the usual criticism of the company unions, are searching for a “new integration” with the capitalists. Mr. Green recently applauded an interview with Gerard Swope, president of the General Electric Company, published in the *World’s Work*. Mr. Swope’s foremen and company managers have driven the unions out of the plants of his company and installed company representation plans. Mr. Swope, like most company unionists, has no objection to individual workers in his plants belonging to regular unions as *individuals*. But if they attempt to agitate for trade union recognition and trade union action in the plant they are immediately discharged. Yet Mr. Green can say of Mr. Swope that the principles which the latter announces “reflect an industrial philosophy of unusual penetration and balance.” Mr. Green hopes that Mr. Swope will somehow, without pressure from the rank and file of his workers—that is, without a strike—come to an understanding with the A.F. of L. and possibly create some sort of union management co-operation such as is now working in the shops of the Baltimore and Ohio railroad. Mr. Green wants to work with Mr. Swope in “an effort to reach this higher plane,” as he calls it—this “creative synthesis,” as one of Mr. Green’s friends has called it. The unions affiliated to the A.F. of L. are, with one or two exceptions, doing almost nothing to fight the company unions. While the A.F. of L. officially passes resolutions and pursues passionless research on the subject, the affiliated officials do nothing. In the steel industry, for example,



the heads of the union—which has 11,000 workers out of 300,000 in the industry—scarcely know the names of the plants in which the company unions have been installed. They have done nothing to fight the company union except pass one pious resolution. The situation is much the same in a number of other industries infested with the company union plans.

The most vigorous attacks on company unions have been made, and are being made, by the left-wingers and the left-wing unions. Some of them, such as those in the needle trade, have only an occasional company union to deal with. But in the larger industries where company unions flourish and other unions are almost non-existent the members of the Trade Union Educational League are fighting vigorously to offset the influence of the company associations. In some places they adopt a policy of "boring from within," attempting to penetrate the company organisations and use them for the best interests of the workers or to show them up completely. In other places they carry on propaganda from the outside in an effort to show the workers in the plants the true nature of the company plans and the necessity of breaking them up as a preliminary to the formation of *bona fide* labour unions. One of the most valuable weapons in this fight is the shop paper, issued by workers in the plant, and sold at the gates for a penny or two. These papers have done a great deal to discredit company union moves and to break down the workers' faith in these devices. All of these papers urge the workers to join the regular unions.

The recent Passaic strike was a good example of a fight on a company union. One of the firms—the most hard-boiled one—had used this device for seven years, having installed it after a previous strike had been broken in order to keep the real union out of the plant. As the strike developed the other companies offered their workers "plans of employee representation" with all the honey words that usually accompany their introduction. But the workers, having seen the actual workings of one company union in the town, and having struck partly to wipe out this association, would have none of it, no matter in what form it was offered. The strike proved to be the end of the company union. Other strikes, prosecuted with similar vigour, would mean the end of company unions in other industries.

Campaigns to organise the unorganised, to create real industrial unions and to build a Labour Party are the best answers to the menace of the company union in America.

ROBERT DUNN.

# TOWARDS A SOCIALIST EDUCATIONAL POLICY

*Being suggestions submitted by the General Secretary of the N.C.L.C. to the Bradford I.L.P.*

**T**HE task of formulating a Socialist conception of education is a very important one, especially as most of the publications on the subject of education, including even those issued by the Labour Party, are much more Liberal than Socialist in outlook. The reforms usually advocated are largely confined to reduction of the numbers in classes, opening the gateway to Universities and Secondary Schools to poor children, etc., etc., all desirable enough in their way, but all completely ignoring the fact that modern orthodox education has been moulded by history to suit the needs of capitalism and must therefore be drastically changed if it is to meet the needs of Socialism or of a class struggling for Socialism. The same lack of appreciation of the fundamentals of Socialism and of educational theory in relation to history is to be found amongst those Labour people who support the policy of the W.E.A., which is nothing more than the application of the principles of Liberalism to education.

It is safe to say that in any system of society State education reflects the needs of the governing class. This was true of Feudalism, is true to-day of Capitalism, and is again exemplified in Russia where a Workers' Government wielding power sees that education reflects the needs of the workers as these are understood by that Government.

A few quotations may not be out of place here, especially as the great majority of professional educationists are completely unaware of the bias on which their education is based. Mr. Clutton Brock writing in 1918 said: "Behind all educational theory there must be social theory. We must know what we wish society to be before we can know what we wish education to be, and all ideas about education are based upon ideas about society, even where no social theory is consciously expressed." Professor John Dewey expresses the same thing in another way in saying: "Since education is a social process and there are many kinds of societies, a criterion of educational criticism and construction implies a particular social ideal." James Weldon, M.A., Professor of Education in the University of Leeds, emphasised the same point in another way. He said: "Looked at in the mass, education may be said to be the efforts made by the community to impose its ideas of culture upon the growing generation"; and John Stuart Mill has correctly said that, "whenever there is an ascendant class, a large proportion of the morality and culture emanates from its class feelings of superiority."

These quotations indicate to the Socialist movement that while Capitalism lasts State education must be biassed in favour of Capitalism and against Socialism to a greater or less degree and that as far as possible the Socialist movement must not make the mistake of "sending out" its social thinking and teaching by depending on the State educational machine. It was precisely because of the recognition of this fact that the movement for Independent Working-class Education came into existence.

To endeavour to produce an education policy suited to Socialism would not be very helpful at the moment, as Socialism is not here. The immediate need of the Socialist movement is therefore to produce an educational policy which will help to bring about Socialism, and that means a policy that will wage war on orthodox education. It will do so in two ways : (1) by depriving that education of as much of its bias as possible, and (2) by running separate educational organisations for the purpose of educating children and adults in the social sciences and in any other subjects that do not get a square deal at the hands of the State educational machine.

### *The Schools.*

So far as the State schools are concerned, a Socialist policy, in addition to being in favour of such reforms as smaller classes, raising of the school leaving age, etc., which have no specific Socialist character, ought, I suggest, to include :—

- (1) Arranging for the careful scrutiny of school textbooks for bias, omissions and historical and sociological inaccuracies. This would involve the re-writing of most school histories from an evolutionary as distinct from the present static point of view.
- (2) Opposing Empire Day and any other attempts to glorify capitalism and war. In the place of such days a Labour Day should be introduced to impress upon the children that civilisation depends upon work and that work is the first duty of every member of society.
- (3) Ensuring that the pictures and other furnishings of the school are not utilised to glorify Royalty, Capitalism and War. (It is not an uncommon thing to find six-inch shells among the decorations of school class rooms).
- (4) Excluding the teaching of religion in State schools, leaving that work to the religious denominations.
- (5) Providing for the teaching of the theory of evolution without which it is impossible to understand the world in which we live. (At present it is possible for students to go through primary school to University without being taught that subject—most unpopular in reactionary circles, because it stresses the idea of constant change and does much to undermine the superstitions which are inherited from the past).
- (6) Providing a fair amount of handicraft work to stimulate use of hands and because a large proportion of children have no very great bent for mental work but have in the direction of handicraft.
- (7) Providing for the guidance of pupils as to the kind of occupations they should follow after they leave school. This would reduce the number of square pegs in round holes.
- (8) Providing for the teaching of elementary sociology so that the children would have some idea of the history of the race from its earliest beginnings and thus would have the development of a social conscience stimulated.

- (9) Providing in the day schools for one common meal, again with a view to developing the social conscience and social behaviour.
- (10) Improving the qualifications of the teachers by (a) raising the standard of the teaching certificate and (b) encouraging taking refresher courses.
- (11) Arranging for the representation of teachers on Education Authorities.

#### *Labour Education for Children.*

As the schools, while Capitalism exists, will in the main be biassed against Socialism, it should be the duty of the Labour movement to provide an elementary education in the social sciences from the working-class point of view. For this purpose Labour children's clubs could be formed which, in addition to providing recreation pure and simple, could also make use of plays, the lantern and the cinema, for educational purposes.

#### *Non-Residential Adult Education and Technical Education.*

This work should be in the hands of the Education authorities so that the present facilities provided through the W.E.A. should be definitely taken over and controlled by the authorities.

In view, however, of the inevitable bias so far as the social sciences are concerned, the Labour movement should develop independent working-class educational work now done by the National Council of Labour Colleges and, to ensure the development of that work, should have residential Labour Colleges for the training of tutors and other specialists. Unless these residential colleges are developed, the Labour movement will be at the mercy of the orthodox educationists so far as the social sciences are concerned. In those circumstances Labour could neither properly educate itself nor be able completely to "spring clean" the universities when opportunity occurs.

#### *The Teachers.*

The Labour movement should make a special effort to interest teachers in its educational point of view. The need for this is realised when we recognise that the main purpose of the school as well as of the press is to serve the needs of modern capitalism, *i.e.*, the needs of the governing class. The position of the teachers as a whole (there is a growing number of exceptions) was, I am afraid, clearly stated by a member of the N.U.T. writing in *Foreign Affairs* in 1921:—

"Teachers are notoriously ill-educated and childish where social, economic and political problems are concerned. The State sees to it that education is a special preserve 'above and outside these sordid problems.' The orthodox ideas on history, patriotism and war of the Governing classes are taught to successive generations of children by the teachers who are hired servants for this work."

The Labour movement, therefore, should (a) by holding special conferences for teachers; (b) by developing the Teachers' Labour League; (c) by endeavouring to make the N.U.T., etc., real Trade Unions, try to break the mental shackles with which the teachers are carefully fitted by the present educational system.

J. P. M. MILLAR.

## ITALIAN FASCISM and THE WORKERS

THE most significant event in Italian economic history during the past twelve months has been the revalorisation of the lira, a development which, on the one hand, has expressed the increasing control over Italian finances on the part of foreign (mainly British) bankers, and, on the other, has led to a severe internal crisis of incalculable political importance.

So long as the dominant force inside the Fascist party was the industrial capitalist class, the low value of the lira in relation to sterling was by no means unwelcome to them, since it fostered the export trade which they sought to develop. Nor were the banking interests hostile to such a development as would afford them profitable avenues of investment. But the industrialists went too far; they built up enormous plants far in excess of reasonable requirements and carried production to heights out of all relation to demand. After several minor panics it became clear to the banks, largely dominated by British and American financiers after the loan agreements with Great Britain and the U.S.A., that industry was ceasing to be a safe field of investment.

A policy of restricting credit issues was inaugurated. In 1925 Volpi, president of the *Banca Commerciale*, became Minister of Finance and commenced the new restrictive policy. Through the summer of 1926 the lira fluctuated wildly; Anglo-Saxon financiers seized the opportunity to buy up semi-bankrupt industrial enterprises (the American Morgan bank secured control even of the great Fiat motor works); and, when this phase passed, stability was induced and the lira rose towards 100, and even higher.

The effect of the fall in the value of the lira on internal conditions in Italy has been little short of disastrous.

In the first place the cost to the exchequer of "pegging" the exchange (*i.e.*, the purchase of currency or bills with Government funds in order to raise the price of currency) has been stupendous and has necessitated exorbitant increases in taxation. In part this has been borne directly by the working class in the form of heavy indirect taxes and an income tax levied on wages. For the rest, though the burden has nominally fallen on to the wealthier classes, it has been shifted in the form of higher prices and lower wages on to the backs of the workers. The restriction of credit has led, moreover, to a great falling off in manufacture. A state of chronic panic exists in commercial circles; bankruptcies occur on a wholesale scale, and even the largest firms are in desperate financial straits. The fall in commercial securities on the Stock Exchanges (share prices on the

average stand at 50 per cent. of the 1924 figures) has meant ruin for investors, and numbers of large business houses remain solvent only by drawing on their reserves.

Precise figures indicating the fluctuations in the cost of living are impossible to obtain. A newspaper which gave publicity to such statistics was quickly suppressed. But there is ample evidence that real wages have fallen continuously and that they now stand at a level lower than at any previous time since the war. The Fascist *Tevere* has recently been stating frankly that the very rock bottom standard of life has been reached and that no further wage reductions must be permitted until there has been a substantial fall in prices.

The industrialists take the opposite view and are carrying on a new campaign to lower wages. They are aided in this by the unemployment which is spreading throughout Italy. In Turin alone there are said to be 50,000 unemployed, and the figure for the whole country is reported to have reached half a million.

The attack on wages is general throughout all sections of industry and is developing with the full connivance of the Government. The Fascist Association of Industrialists issued a proclamation in May affirming that wages are the only element in the cost of production which can be reduced and that the workers realise the necessity for this and accept it with fortitude. A vast propaganda in favour of lower wages is being carried on by the Fascist organisations throughout the country, and their decisions are published as "the heroic resolve of the workers to save the economic situation."

A favourite smoke-screen put up by the bosses to cover wage reductions is the "campaign against the high cost of living." The price of food is to be brought down as a result of reductions forced on agricultural workers by the Fascist peasants' unions; similarly the export trade in silks, motor cars, etc., is to be bolstered up by lower prices made possible by lower wages.

Meanwhile, in spite of the cost of living campaign, no fall actually occurs in the price of necessities, and the campaign is seen clearly to be dope to quieten the discontent of the masses. Following the decontrol of house rents these have risen to fantastic heights. Great excitement prevails in the Press, and there is no doubt that, if landlords do not adopt some form of compromise, legal action will again have to be taken to enforce more reasonable rents.

✓ The Labour Charter which was published in May, and which caused some carefully engineered comment in the British Press, is, of course, mere eyewash. It is not a law and has no practical significance; it is merely a rhetorical statement of the principles of Fascist legislation on Labour topics, phrased with the brilliant duplicity which has made Fascist publicists famous for their ability to say

nothing in many glowing phrases. Even *The Times* describes the basic principle of the Charter ("work is a social duty for all") as an "edifying platitude."

The Trade Union law of 1926 had already taken away all legal powers from the organised working class. By removing the right to strike and by restricting the right to negotiate on conditions of labour to officially "recognised" unions, the Government had made effective organisation within the law impossible.

The final blow to freedom of speech was dealt by the Press Law, which requires a Government licence for every periodical publication. The only papers genuinely reflecting the interests of the workers must now be clandestine and illegal.

Meanwhile the policy of reducing the working classes to an ever lower degree of subjection has been supported by the repressive measures taken against active elements among the masses who offer effective opposition to the Fascist tyranny.

Advantage has been taken of each "attempt" on the life of Mussolini (there is good reason to believe that these attempts were deliberately staged for the purpose) to organise an intensive campaign of brutal violence against trade union leaders, Left-wing politicians and all who are believed to be heartening the masses and preparing them to resist the attacks of the bosses. In addition to the constant burnings, beatings and murders carried out by Black Shirt hooligans with no legal sanction, there have been mass arrests, trials and imprisonments, together with a new form of punishment in the shape of exile to barren islands off the Italian coast.

The legal machinery of repression was extended and developed to an unprecedented degree by the Defence of the State Law of 1926. This applied savage punishments to political offences and introduced the death penalty into Italian law for crimes "directed against the State, the King or the Prime Minister." This law also set up Special Tribunals, consisting exclusively of military officers, to try offenders of a political character. At the same time an extensive reorganisation of the army, the Fascist militia and the police has been carried out, with a view to strengthening Italian offensive powers abroad and repressive machinery at home.

The opposition to Fascism has shown, until the first part of the present year, an increasing degree of feebleness and failure. The Aventine (bourgeois anti-Fascist parties) fell to pieces after the Matteotti murder and their futile policy of abstention from Parliament. The Right-wing Socialists compromised themselves by co-operating with the Aventine and by their inability to give a lead to the workers in the hour of their unparalleled distress.

The culmination of the defeatist policy of the Right-wing Labour

leaders was reached in January of this year when, after a number had deserted to the Fascist ranks, the headquarters of the *Confederazione Generale del Lavoro* was transferred to Paris. This retreat from the scene of action was naturally followed by the total failure of the C.G.L. to represent the Italian workers in any way. The affiliated membership, already reduced to a few thousands,\* fell almost to zero. The workers were without a central organisation.

The rebuilding of the C.G.L. in the last few months is one of the greatest events in the European working-class movement. At the very moment when the difficulties were greatest and the need for a strong central lead was at its height, and in face of the most terrific obstacles, a successful attempt to unite the workers of Italy has been made.

The trade union movement is being re-formed on a basis of factory committees; these are grouped into local federations which in turn send delegates to a national body. A provisional committee has been formed to set the C.G.L. on its feet and to counter the class-collaborationist activities of the reformists. Clandestine papers, mainly under Communist direction, are being circulated in the factories, and the whole apparatus of organised opposition to the Fascist tyranny has been set in motion.

The final bankruptcy of the reformists in the Italian Labour movement thus means an intensification of the class struggle in two ways. In the first place the capitalist class can no longer rely on the corruptionist methods practised by d'Aragnona and his colleagues as a means of keeping the workers quiet; they are more and more driven to maintain their class hegemony by naked force and extremist legal and illegal means. And in the second place the removal of the Right-wing leadership has involved a big swing to the Left among the masses. The workers and the Fascists are face to face. The stage is set for the fiercest phase of the class war yet seen in Italy. And the workers grow daily more clearly conscious of their purpose and better prepared for the destruction of Fascism. L.W.

\* The strength of the C.G.L. in 1924 was 135,000; in 1925, 150,000; in July, 1926, 6,300.

## IS MARX OUT OF DATE ?

*In our March issue an article by M. H. D. opened a discussion on Max Eastman's recent criticisms of the Marxian philosophy; and the "Bookshelf" in the April issue expressed certain points of disagreement with this article. Philips Price here continues the discussion, and contributes his own view of the matter.*

**I**T seems that towards the end of the eighteenth century learned people were beginning to speculate about the origin of Life and to try to find some philosophy which could account for historical developments. Of course those speculations had been going on before, but never to such an extent as then. It is



probably no accident that Goethe puts into the mouth of Faust those famous lines which begin "*Im Anfang war das Wort.*" Goethe, roughly contemporary with Hegel, was putting the question—What is the ultimate cause of Evolution? Goethe seems to have left the answer vague, though possibly some close student of his writings might find something more concrete. But Hegel was the first to formulate a definite philosophy which could provide a framework for historical developments. He rejected the Church's supernatural Word and Revelation and substituted for it "pure thought" or, as Goethe has it, "sense" (Sinn). This pure thought was really synonymous with the Deity, projected itself into the world of matter and by its reaction upon this matter caused evolution in Nature and human society. This idea was the driving force. The material world was passive and the instrument through which it manifested itself. If the Church then said: In the Beginning was the Word, Hegel said: In the Beginning was the Idea. Like the Church he was still authoritarian. There was no mutual reaction between mind and matter. Matter was imposed upon by mind. He only adopted a more mystic form of authority, latent in each animate being. But he was a child of his time. The Prussian State which he glorified, as well he might with his ideas, was trying to wed industrial capitalism to the feudal and bureaucratic system. This synthesis succeeded for several decades in stabilising itself, and Hegel naturally saw in this synthesis the accomplishment in Germany of his dialectic theory. Hegel was neither reactionary nor progressive; he was just what his time made him.

By the middle of last century, however, times had changed. Industrial capitalism was everywhere in Europe bursting the framework of the feudal, bureaucratic States. The time for a synthetic stabilisation was at end. An era of forceful activity had begun. Marx was the first great brain to see this and to go even further and foresee the next stage when the new capitalist synthesis would be replaced by something newer still. So impressed was he with the rapid growth of capitalist industry that he began to see the parallel between methods of producing wealth and social, political and cultural forms. The interaction between the new forms of production and the mentality of the people was the source from which he saw the driving force in human affairs generated. And so amidst the revolutionary thunder of 1848, when capitalism was coming into its own and the new class of wage-earners was knocking at the door and demanding its share of the wealth produced, he said the words: Revolution is the Locomotive of History.

Is matter then the fundamental reality? Does the Force which moves society spring only from the economic factors? That is the question which after reading Marx's and Engel's works one might

have some difficulty in answering. I do not think that it is wise to lay down the law. Some of their writings can be interpreted one way and some another. And, as it is important for modern Marxists to get some idea of how to approach the problem of the rôle of personality in history and of the effect of cultural superstructure upon economic systems, one welcomes any book which deals with this subject. I, therefore, took up the book of Max Eastman, "*Marx, Lenin and the Science of Revolution*," with a hope that it would contribute to this problem. I put it down, however, with a feeling that after hunting over 200 pages for the Easter egg from which I could hatch a philosophy of neo-Marxism, Max Eastman had led me up a tree and showed me a mare's nest! It is mostly ably written and he has done a service to the Socialist movement throughout the world by forcing attention on the first principles of Historical Materialism, about which there is a lot of loose thinking. But he has not shown us any real flaws in Marx's fundamental theories. It is obviously rash to dub Marx as one who preached that "matter is the fundamental reality" and that according to him "our brains are nothing but an apparatus for making mental reflections of the world of matter." This may have been Marx's philosophy, but I know of nothing to prove it. Indeed on p. 56 Eastman quotes Marx's admission of the rôle played by "accidents" in history, with the proviso that these accidents can only have limited effects ultimately. But it is far wiser to interpret Marx's writings as insisting upon the inter-dependence between social institutions and culture upon economic systems. Marx said that a form of government based on one class could not exist if another class formed the sole basis of wealth production. But he did not say that, if the scientist had not had the idea which created the new instruments of wealth production, those instruments would have appeared all the same. It is unfair to accuse Marx of Animism and Fatalism, ponderous and involved as much of his writings are. Obviously there must be interplay between the idea of the scientist and the matter which makes up the economic system, while the ideological superstructure of the old social system can delay for decades the coming of the new order. Living in an age when the new forces of production in textiles, transport and metallurgy were coming everywhere into force, Marx naturally tended to emphasise the material side and to gloss over the cultural hindrances of an earlier age. Like Hegel, he was the child of his time. Nor was Marx fatalistically looking upon human evolution, as Eastman suggests, when he accuses him of creating a Socialist religion. Did not the Communist Manifesto suggest that he realised that the proletariat must *act* if it was to fulfil the rôle which economic forces had prepared for it? This is the very reverse of fatalism. And if his later writings were

concerned more with the analysis of economic forces than with the summoning of the proletariat to the class struggle, this is almost certainly explained by the fact that in the last half of last century industrial capitalism had stabilised itself and was providing for the working classes a tolerable means of existence through the profits of colonial expansion.

Has the last alternative in Goethe's famous passage in *Faust*—In the Beginning was the Deed—yet found justification in history? Just as the coming of Marx denoted the passage of Socialism from Utopia (under Hegelian influence) to Science, so did the coming of Lenin and the Russian Revolution denote the passage of Socialism from Science to Action. But Eastman is quite right when he points out on p. 58 that the most successful modern Marxians, the Russian Bolsheviks, betray their belief in the "rôle of their own heroes in history," and on p. 152 that the whole Bolshevik action is a "denial of the philosophy according to which revolution is an automatic product of Nature's development." This treatment of the tactics of the Bolsheviks is one of the best parts of his book. But he seems to think that both the old Marxians and the Leninites are inconsistent. He accuses the former of having talked rank materialism and then borrowed a mystic dialectic from Hegel. He accuses the Bolsheviks of believing in an inevitable economic development and then worshipping heroes and denouncing all personalities opposed to them, as if everything depended on individual action. I see nothing inconsistent in this. Marx uniting mysticism to economics was a reflection of his relatively quiet Victorian epoch. Lenin uniting a religious belief in the social revolution with a denunciation of all "compromising traitors, like MacDonald," was only a reflection of the disturbed epoch which brought him to power. It is natural that the Bolsheviks should deal considerably in personalities even to the length of being grossly abusive, because they have lived in a world of action. They have seen Goethe's words—In the Beginning was the Deed—come true. They will have no truck with people "in whom ideas do not mean action," as Eastman puts it. Of course, this also accounts for the Bolsheviks' subconscious overestimate of personalities, their abuse of Labour leaders, because they believe that they are responsible for the postponement of the World Revolution. The Bolsheviks, in fact, rationalise their disappointment at the relative, if temporary, stabilisation of finance capital throughout the world—a natural economic development—by attributing it to an absence of spiritual grace in the Western Labour leaders. This only proves that they, too, are a dialectical product, born in a time when the wave of the world revolution was advancing rapidly, and now left high and dry, when it has temporarily ebbed.

But nothing that I can see proves Eastman's thesis, which seems to be that mind, ideas and culture can under some circumstances act independently of the material world. I admit a cultural superstructure may exist in history independent of an economic foundation, but not for long. The Catholic and feudal Scottish Stuarts imposed their ideas upon the government of England already well advanced in the mercantile system of a bourgeois revolution. Their personalities caused the Civil War, which was only an incident in English history. The real revolution had taken place before. This only shows how ideas may postpone but not prevent economic trends.

A somewhat similar book to Eastman's has just appeared on the continent by the Belgian Socialist, Hendrik de Man, called *Zur Psychologie des Sozialismus*. He is trying to make out that Marxists are wrong in not recognising individual Will rather than mass consciousness of an economic condition as the driving force of history. Socialism, he says, is not a material but a spiritual problem. In this I think he goes further than Eastman. In his criticism of de Man's book, the German Social Democrat, Gustav Radbruch, in the *Gesellschaft*, Berlin, April, 1927, correctly puts the true Marxian position, which answers all the gibes of capitalist professors as well as the honest doubts of good Socialists, as follows:—"The economic condition liberates in the mind of the oppressed psychical effect and will impulse, which shows the way to action . . . When the unconscious struggle for the idea creates consciousness, then there is a fusion between the economic interest and the ethical idea and the creation of the most powerful spiritual force that exists. *I wish to see the economic factor in Socialism not replaced by but supplemented with the ethical.*" (My italics.)

Marx, of course, did not live in an age, nor did he foresee it, when science would break down the boundary line between Force and Matter. That is happening to-day. To the question, What is Matter? one can now only say, if one accepts the latest research work in Physio-Chemistry, an area in the ether where certain forces operate. Possibly in the future Bio-Chemistry will break down the boundary between the psychical and the material world altogether. Indeed, tendencies are at hand already in this direction. It is unwise, therefore, to dogmatise. The scientific values of to-day are not those of last century. The driving force in history seems to lie in that region which borders between both the spiritual and the material world and derives its force from both, for both may be part of the same phenomenon.

M. PHILIPS PRICE.

## SOME RECENT AMERICAN LITERATURE

**A**T one time in America it was a startling achievement to write a novel or a collection of short stories. To-day it has become an infection. Every newspaper reporter, it is claimed, has his desk drawers crowded with either story or novelette, epic or drama. Magazine editors are harassed repeatedly with fiction manuscripts that reveal the imagination of a pedagogue and the understanding of an adolescent. America has been captured by the cheap writing and cheaper reading craze. Thousands want to write and tens of thousands wait to read the cheap, flashing melodrama which has grown into a literary disease. The serious writer, therefore, suffers. Occasionally a Sinclair Lewis or a Sherwood Anderson will catch the fancy of the public, and have his work attain a sale sufficient to insure him of a safe income. Until the appearance of *An American Tragedy* in 1925, Theodore Dreiser had been writing for a generation without security of return. It is the same story with almost all writers of serious fiction, serious drama, serious criticism.

This situation reflects vividly the social conditions in the United States. With a Labour movement that is small, backward and conservative, there is little inspiration for a literature of radical character. Upton Sinclair is the only novelist who dedicates his work to the proletariat. In Sinclair's work there is, of course, the sentimentality of the obvious, the superficiality of unfinished art. Excellent in intention, it is poor in execution. By sentimentalising the proletariat, his work fails of naturalness, conviction, and beauty. Yet no other American writer of to-day, with the exception of Michael Gold, has taken his position so definitely with the proletariat.

The leaders in American literature to-day, Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Floyd Dell, Willa Cather, all express a transitional attitude. Sherwood Anderson comes the closest to proletarian sentiment. Anderson appreciates the importance of economics in American life, in all life; he protests and despairs, but does not see the destiny of it all. In other words, like the artist, he feels the situation, but cannot sociologise it; he senses the change but cannot analyse it. In the following passage something of his attitude is manifest:—

"What a day it will be—the day I mean when all working men come to a certain decision—that they no longer put their hands to cheap material or do cheap, hurried work—for their manhood's sake.

"The dominant note in American life to-day is the factory hand." . . .

"I got on a train and went to another town, where I slept in a working man's

hotel. The furniture was ugly and I did not like that, but I had got back among the people to whom I belonged."

In *An Old Man's Folly*, Floyd Dell has turned at last to the American radical movement for substance, if not inspiration. This novel is laid in that chaotic period that encircled and included the World War. Its gesture is familiar, its struggle intimate. Even some of its protagonists can be recognised by detail and action. Sanford Peyton, for example, is Upton Sinclair. The book is actually based on incidents which occurred in Los Angeles, although the sub-stratum of fact is imaginatively reconstructed in order to give the novel continuity of form and cogency of narration.

In reference to the character of Sanford Peyton, who described a pretty ball as "a disgusting imitation of the vices of the idle rich," and who went "over to the war party," declaring that "all radicals should be willing to accept loyally the leadership and guidance of that great idealist, President Wilson," the comment of Upton Sinclair is at once interesting and arresting:—

"If I had know then what I know now, I would have gone to jail with Floyd's pacifists."

Few periods in American history have been as pregnant with excitement and terror as the one dramatised in this novel. The entrance of America into the war marked the beginning of a period of terrific tension. It was again, in the words of Paine, "a time that tried men's souls." Had the morale of the American radicals, who were split by weakness, sentimentality, evasion and flight, turned into a socialised instead of an individualistic reaction, the catastrophe of disintegration might have been avoided. At least part of the great, sweeping force that was behind the movement at the time of the famous St. Louis resolution might have been preserved. Instead, we have an *ennui* and despair that have resulted in the disillusionment of the tired radical and dubious liberal.

Dell has pictured this period with a fidelity that is only marred by its lack of intensity and power. Its psychological types are strikingly portrayed. The spirit of enthusiasm, the dismay, the confusion are all interwoven into the body of the novel. With *An Old Man's Folly*, Dell has now written a novel that is devoted to things radical instead of things erotic. Upton Sinclair, since the *Journal of Arthur Stirling*, has been the leading author of Labour-novels in America. While *An Old Man's Folly* is certainly not a Labour-novel, nor even a contribution to an embryonic "prolectcult," it, nevertheless, presents a picture of a phase of American radicalism that is more intimate and sympathetic than that which would be produced by a bourgeois novelist. In simple, its sentiment is radical. Its attitude towards the last war is radical. Its attitude towards the Labour movement is radical. Its attitude towards Russia is radical.

It is in Robert Littell's satire, *Read America First*, however,

rather than in American novels, that the American spirit is best revealed. In approaching the American situation, the radical attack has been painfully incomprehensive. We have few, if any, satirists. Our novelists are not numerous. Our philosophic theoreticians are not even a handful. The satiric approach in America, for example, is achieved by the liberals and not by the radicals. One of the ways of greeting the American situation without acquiescence is the satiric. Another is the evasive. The evasive is typified by the emphasis upon psycho-analysis instead of upon social background as a motif.

*Read America First* is one of the latest expressions of the satiric attack. In his essay, *Learn While you Sleep*, he has satirised American education and American intelligence in distinctly subtle and striking fashion :—

“Taking a jump into the future we can easily imagine the life of the average citizen immeasurably enriched by the discovery that knowledge can enter into him, as it were, via the Ostermoor. Within a year or two, nine-thirty-five will find Mr. John Gutz, citizen and monkey-wrench merchant, at his desk on the ninth floor of the Consolidated Asset and Liability Building. The day will pass in dictating letters, evading callers and biting the ends off ten-cent cigars. Mr. Gutz will go to lunch with a big customer, and tell him the story of the girl from Duluth. After lunch his routine will be varied by a personal call from the representative of the Learn-Radio Co., and Mr. Gutz will sign up for a six-weeks’ General Culture Course. When he gets home he will find the head-set hanging by the head of his bed. He will go to bed earlier than usual, but, being in a state of somewhat excitement, will remember nothing, even though he heard it, of the first half-hour on the history of bee-keeping. Eventually, under the influence of a discourse on vital statistics among the janitors of Atlantis, he will fall asleep. From that time on he will begin to learn. By learning we do not mean that he will be training his mind, which has never been the serious purpose of education, but that he will remember, not in substance or in part, but in toto, everything which has been imparted to him over the radio. He will make up the next morning to recall, with literal accuracy, the multiplication table up to forty-nine times (which will help him in his business); the full names, addresses and positions of all state and county officers (which will make him interested in self-government); the principal parts of speech in Swedish (which will go far toward solving the servant problem); the Gettysburg address (for possible use on the Fourth of July); a list of all paintings by Rubens, the size thereof, the subject, and where now located (which will give him an insight into the world of art); and the name, price, and major specifications of every passenger automobile manufactured in the U.S.A. (which will increase his powers of conversation in the world of men). All at a moderate charge, without the slightest contribution of effort on his part.”

The class struggle has written itself into contemporary American literature. In a novel such as Upton Sinclair’s *Oil*, the effect of this class struggle upon the proletariat is revealed. In the novels of most other American writers of to-day the effect of this class struggle in producing a prosperous merchantry and an unrevolutionary art is more starkly portrayed. Only a more radical economic situation will produce a more radical art.

V. F. CALVERTON

(Editor, *The Modern Quarterly*).

# Reviews of Books

## HISTORY

*History of England, Part III. From 1714 to the Present Day.* G. M. Trevelyan (Longman, 4/- net.)

*The English Poor Law in the Eighteenth Century*, by Dorothy Marshall, M.A., Ph.D. (Routledge, 12/6 net.)

**T**HE interpretation of history by an historian hailing from Cambridge University seems to consist, as in the past, of the glorification of individuals and events of the ruling class.

History now seems to consist of the events due to philosophers, scientists, and legislators, who are now considered the teachers and instruments of progress. Consequently this book is the history of the rise of the British capitalist class to power, and how they have built a mighty British Empire. The history of the working class and its organisations is only mentioned here and there in a very few pages, just when it seems to have been a disturbing element to the path of peace. However, the book is useful for advanced students in relation to the formation of the present political parties belonging to the capitalist class.

The problem of poverty is, by its very nature, of vital importance to all classes, but to none more so than to the "naturally" poor, the proletariat. Consequently a book which grapples with any aspect of this social evil is of vital importance to

the working class student of sociology. Miss Marshall's book is quite readable. It analytically lays bare all the apologetic attempts at Poor Law Reform during the eighteenth century, showing that our noble legislators always, and without exception, mistook the effect for the cause. Fortunately the author does not suffer from a statistical complex as is so often the case with writers of works of this nature.

In examining the reforms which were introduced consequent upon the Industrial Revolution, she rightly exposes the fallacy of trying to localise the administration of the Poor Law under the parish. "Since poverty is a malady which attacks an entire nation, it must be dealt with by the Central Government acting for the nation as a whole, and not by the separate localities which compose the nation." Quite.

And the author concludes by saying:—"The only true solution for the Poor Law reformer must be sought in drastic reforms of our social system whereby undeserved poverty can be eliminated." Exactly. J. T. DORRICOT.

## PAMPHLETS

- (1) *The Miners' Next Task*, 1d.; (2) *Is Trade Unionism Played Out?* 1d.; (3) *Trade Union Leadership*, 1d.; (4) *British and Russian Workers* (National Minority Movement), by A. Lozovsky, 3d.; (5) *A Call to the Youth*, by William Rust, 1d.; (6) *A Congress of Young Fighters*, 2d. (Young Communist League); (7) *Passaic*, by Albert Weisbord, 15c.; (8) *The Damned Agitator*, by Michael Gold, 10c.; (9) *Constitution of the U.S.S.R.* (Daily Worker Publishing Co., Chicago), 10c.; (10) *Labour Party Limited (A Play)*, by George E. Wilkinson (the author, 12 Knigge Avenue, Wellington, N.Z.), 1/-; (11) *World Citizenship, its Basis in Human Nature*, by Archie McArthur (I.L.P.), 2d.

Whatever one may think of the Minority Movement, there is certainly no excuse for misconception or misrepresentation of its aims and outlook. If there ever was a movement that could explain itself more simply or clearly, we have yet to come across it. Nos. 1, 2, and 3, which give the M.M. views on one union for miners, the future of trade unionism, and the need for a new leadership, are

models of pamphleteering art. No. 4, by the Secretary of the R.I.L.U., is a history of Anglo-Russian T.U. relations, with some important documents as an appendix.

That the coming generation is going to learn from the follies of its elders is apparent to all who have studied the youth movements. Nos. 5 and 6, the opening speech and the resolutions



passed at the recent Y.C.L. Congress, show that the young workers are able to tackle their problems at least as well as those who are handicapped by age and experience.

Accounts of individual strikes are always absorbing reading, and when the subject is as epic as the struggle of the Passaic textile workers and the writer as able as Albert Weisbord, the story becomes a little classic. Besides its value as a picture of American capitalism in action, it is of peculiar interest to the British movement as a reflection of its past and a prophecy of its future. The fight to organise the unskilled in Passaic is an exact parallel to the New Unionism of thirty or forty years ago in this country, and the difficulties the Passaic workers had to contend with under the U.S. law are a foretaste of our plight if the Blacklegs' Charter is passed.

Nos. 8 and 9 are two more volumes of the excellent Little Red Library. *The Damned Agitator* contains three interesting sketches of working-class life, and the other is a handy summary of the Soviet Constitution and of social insurance and the position of trade unions in the U.S.S.R.

*Labour Party Limited* is a savage satire on that type of comfortable class-collaboration leadership that flourishes in New Zealand as it always does under the flag of the free. Some of the caricatures of New Zealand fossils read as if they were meant for certain English leaders whose portraits and writings are well known to readers of the gutter press. But the dramatic technique is so poor that *Labour Party Limited* would require complete rewriting before it would get across as a play, though as a pamphlet it makes its points admirably.

With No. 11 we pass into another world. The author of *Religion and Socialism: A Plea for Both* endeavours, by means of some very dubious metaphysics, to show that International Socialism of a very vague kind is the only world-order that is in harmony with the three absolutes, truth, beauty, and goodness. Marxism is rejected, the class struggle is not mentioned, and a useful motto is provided, which we commend to Jix and Churchill, to the Shanghai millowners and the Standard Oil Company, to Mussolini and to Pilsudski. "Is it not man's true nature and eventual destiny to be good?"

B. W.

Readers must find *The World Policy of Germany, 1890-1912*, by Otto Hamman (Allen & Unwin, 12/6) both interesting and helpful. New light is thrown on the changing current of European politics and diplomacy during those momentous years. What alliances, what diplomatic manœuvres were necessary for a growing Germany to adopt in an ever-changing industrial condition are clearly revealed by Otto Hamman.

A Germany which insistently demanded unification as a first step to power in the economic world is a fitting background for Bismarck, whose purpose and part in bringing about a united Germany. Much that has hitherto been unrevealed about the "Iron Chancellor" is discussed with effect. That the Chancellor was limited to his time becomes equally clear in the section which treats of the transition to world politics. Now a new stage is set and new actors appear on the scene. What issues ensued politically and diplomatically from then to 1912 are clearly revealed. Although Hamman does not examine the effective economic influences

at work, his treatment of human figures in politics and at Court merits distinction; and to those who know the economic history of Europe, this book affords a valuable contribution to an understanding of the forces at work in a Europe staged for world conflict.

It appears that the author believes that, had Germany retained the Bismarckian policy of indifference and inaction in world politics, all would have been well.

Whether, later, the Kaiser wanted or did not want war, there was world conflict: for reasons that our author does not discuss.

This book must be read and is worth possessing.

D. R.

*Coal: A Challenge to the National Conscience*, edited by Alan Porter (Hogarth Press, 2/6), consists of six chapters, five of which can be safely handed over to the local parson. The other chapter, chapter two, contains a remarkable nut-shell history of the General Strike, from which is quoted the following:—

"The push of the General Strike

came from the most intelligent and racially most valuable members of the rank and file. All who had provincial experience of the catastrophe are alive to this fact. Had it been otherwise the fiasco that occurred on the ninth day would have occurred on the first. That the surrender was such a fiasco was the fault of the leaders, whose bellies were made for the milk of negotiation, rather than the meat of revolution. If there was any tint of redness about the Trade Union Council (General Council is meant) it was but due to the Government paint thrown at it by Mr. Churchill, and was not its natural colour. . . ."

"And they waved the sword of revolution in the air in the manner of one who has never before handled a sword, and who is obviously conscious that the weapon is exceedingly dangerous to the wielder."

"Thenceforth the leaders of revolution dreamed peace. Having made

the gesture because they could not help it, they prayed night and day that the miners would accept any terms that the mineowners would offer, so that the leaders in general could make an heroic tale of satisfied honour out of a miserable episode conducted with trembling hands and fluttering hearts."

"In fact, the red flag was hoisted by Churchill, and waved by J-Hicks, while the Trades Union Council tried to pull it down."

Space forbids further quotation, and comment would only spoil the quotations inserted here. N. E.

*The League of Nations and the World's Workers*, by K. E. Innes (Hogarth, 1/6), is a useful elementary survey of the work of the I.L.O., which is helping to prepare the way, despite its present weakness, for the international organisation of Labour. The date of the Dorchester labourers' prosecution should be 1834, not 1832. M. S.



#### OXFORD "SNAGS."

SIR,—Your correspondent, R.E.B., has missed the conclusive point of his own case. I am not worried about what may happen to Trade Unionists at Oxford, who are well able to look after themselves. The academic atmosphere of Oxford cannot be more stifling of sensible ideas than the atmosphere of the House of Commons; and yet the intelligent members of the Labour Party seem to have survived it with their faculties, on the whole, unimpaired.

I would support any scheme for sending Trade Unionists to Oxford because I think it would be a very good thing for Oxford. It might destroy Oxford as a class institution by provoking everyone there into reconsidering the silly assumptions upon which they base their ethics, economics and ideas of government. I do not say these things would happen, but they might happen, just as the irruption of the barbarians destroyed Rome. The analogy is not appropriate in any other sense, as Trade Unionists at Oxford would certainly disprove the superstition that the working class is a mob of illiterate barbarians to hosts of students who, in the normal course of

events, would not take the trouble to find it out for themselves.

Whether it would be a good thing for the Trade Unionists is not such an important question; it seems to me doubtful in any case. Presumably they will not go to Oxford to learn the technique of Trade Union organisation, and the N.C.L.C. or the L.S.E. can teach them economics better than the professors of Christ's College. I suggest they go there to teach economics, if only informally; indeed, they could do it all the more effectively because their university status would be that of undergraduates. There is no need to despair entirely of the 'Varsity man. Just as I cordially agree with your correspondent in his opinion that Trade Unionists are not such intellectual weaklings as to succumb to the Oxford atmosphere, so I argue that all students are not fatheads who cannot see facts which stare them in the face, even if they are complicated economic facts. For the sake of these benighted heathens, who may become Socialists if they are given the chance, send some Trade Unionists to Oxford.

Yours faithfully,

W. H. M.

# The N.C.L.C. at Work



(Reports for this page should be sent to J. P. M. Millar, General Secretary, National Council of Labour Colleges, 62 Hanover Street, Edinburgh.)

**NEW LOCAL AFFILIATIONS:** The following is a list of the new affiliations obtained in April by the local Colleges:—Glasgow, 2; Liverpool, 2; London, 2; Brighouse, 1; Leeds, 1.

**CALCUTTA:** *The Employees' Gazette* of April publishes a paragraph advocating the establishment of a Labour College for the Indian Labour Movement.

**"HISTORY OF THE MINERS' STRUGGLE":** This pamphlet of Jack Hamilton's, published by the Plebs League, is being used for English Lessons in the Workers' Community College, Leipzig, Germany.

**J. HAMILTON,** the President of the N.C.L.C., is publishing an Outline of Trade Union History in *Liverpool's Labour Voice*. The first section appeared on the 3rd of June.

**TEACHERS' LABOUR LEAGUE:** J. P. M. Millar, General Secretary of the N.C.L.C., has been invited to become Vice-President of the Teachers' Labour League.

**ANNUAL MEETING AND NATIONAL SUMMER SCHOOL:** We shall be pleased to welcome visitors at the N.C.L.C.'s Annual Meeting and Summer School at Kiplin Hall.

**NATIONAL UNION OF RAILWAYMEN:** The issue, so far as the Labour College is concerned, now lies with the A.G.M. N.U.R. delegates.

**NATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE:** All applications for admission to the above fortnight's Training Centre, which commences 30th July and which is to be held at the Labour College, London, should be sent in immediately. For full particulars see last month's N.C.L.C. Notes.

**ABERDEEN TRADES COUNCIL AND W.E.A.:** Comrade Morrison, of Aberdeen, tells us that by 34 votes to 14 the suggestion was turned down by the Aberdeen Trades Council that it should

participate in the Extra Mural Educational work conducted by the W.E.A. in Aberdeen University, to which the latter makes a contribution of £100.

**WINTER SESSION:** College Committees and Secretaries are reminded that arrangements for the winter session should be completed as soon as possible in order that Divisional Class Lists may be prepared and circulated by the last day of August in order that every Trade Union Branch may have had the circular before them prior to the opening of the classes at the beginning of October.

**WHAT THE DIVISIONS ARE DOING.**

**Division 1:** No report.

**Division 2:** The event of this month was the Littlehampton Annual Meet at Southwoods. N.C.L.C.ers from Storrington, Worthing, Bognor, Brighton and Littlehampton, to the number of 70,

## The LABOUR MONTHLY

A Magazine of International Labour

Contents for July.

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THE CHINESE REVOLUTION TURNS LEFT - Early Browder

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met under the admirable arrangements of Miss S. Pedley. The motor trip of 14 miles up the river Arun was in the capable hands of two other comrades—Gladden and Skipper Mitchel. The subjects (handled very efficiently) were "The Class Struggle in Practice and Theory" by the Organiser, and "Knowledge as a means to an end," by Dan Hoxsted. Comrade Harrison, of Brighton, detailed the practical results of the N.C.L.C. at Brighton. Joe Mathews, the Littlehampton tutor, discoursed on "Revolutionary Poetry," with quotations from Burns, J. S. Clark, Francis Adams and others. After tea there was an excellent exhibition of folk and country dances, led by Comrades Hoxsted and Mrs. Mathews. The popular opinion of the value of these Meets was expressed by one woman comrade who said: "What a pity they only come once a year." "Go thou and do likewise," is the advice of these comrades of South Sussex to other N.C.L.C.ers in Division 2.

The Movement has lost a most valuable comrade at Bournemouth by the death of E. Bulger.

*Division 3:* Comrade Keymer, of Braintree, reports success in not only carrying on summer work but in doing propaganda in the villages round about. Successful Day Schools have been run at Bedford, Ipswich, and Norwich, on "Labour in China" with the help of Comrades Bridgman and She, of the Chinese Information Bureau. The Divisional School had Mr. Cheng as a substitute lecturer and the students were keenly interested in Comrade Ashcroft's explanation of the curriculum and methods of the Labour College. The Divisional Conference decided to grant an additional scholarship at the Training Centre, and Comrades Keymer (Braintree) and Drake (Peterborough) are the final nominees. Special lectures on the "Trades Disputes Bill" have been given at High Wycombe, St. Neots, Felixstowe, Staines, Cambridge, Richmond and Southend Union Branches. Colchester T.C. is having a special meeting on the W.E.A. v. N.C.L.C. controversy, to decide which it will support. Braintree and St. Albans are the only classes continuing through the summer, with Peterborough having periodical discussions. Some of the Secretaries have already accepted the proposals made for

the new classes. The others should inform the organiser at once so that the Divisional Class List can be issued in good time.

*Division 4:* Newport College has granted four Correspondence Courses to selected students for the purpose of training them for tutors. Merthyr College has submitted to its Annual Meeting a most successful report. Thanks to the work of Secretary Hunt and the services of the tutor the College is making excellent progress in Swansea Valley. On the initiative of the Ebbw Vale E.T.C. an excellent conference was held on the Trade Union Bill. South Wales Division has called a Conference of Women's Organisations in connection with the campaign to set up an N.C.L.C. Women's Educational Committee.

*Division 5:* Thanks to the services of Comrades Owen, Williams and Thomas the position in Division 5 has been substantially improved. The Divisional Council has expressed its appreciation to the Organisers concerned.

*Division 6:* The Birmingham and Walsall Colleges are busy with their joint effort in the form of a Field Day and Students' Rally at Sutton Park on the 25th. Birmingham had a visit from our General Secretary who addressed a rather hurriedly convened meeting of the Committee. We had a very interesting exchange of views. Nuneaton College is still doing well and our Movement is becoming a real influence in the district. The Organiser addressed Wolverhampton Trades Council on the Trade Union Bill. The class at Aldridge is making rapid strides. Preparations are well in hand for the restarting of the Worcester College. The Birmingham Secretary is back amongst us again and we hope his recovery will be complete.

*Division 7:* No Report.

*Division 8:* The Annual Meeting and Week-end School of the Liverpool and District College was a big success. Attendance of delegates at the business meeting was below the average but over 130 students attended each lecture given by Will Paul (Editor *Sunday Worker*). Paul was in fine fettle and roused great enthusiasm. Over 30 students, quite fifty per cent. women, are attending the class on "Local Government" held in conjunction with the Liverpool T.C. and L.P. This is dis-

tinctly good for the summer session. A feature is the number of essays written by students. The Manchester Plebs Players will produce "The Best of Both Worlds" at the S.E. Lancs. School—July 23rd and 24th. Day Schools were held on June 25th and 26th at Penketh, nr. Warrington, and Greenfield, nr. Oldham, respectively. E. Redfern was the lecturer at both schools. North Lancs. Area is anticipating an early resumption of work by the Organiser, A. L. Williams. Prospects are good for a scheme with the Padiham Weavers' Association. Many meetings have been addressed by the Organisers in connection with the campaign against the Trade Union Bill. The majority have been dinner-time factory talks.

*Division 9:* We are having a good response to our Circular to Branches of Unions with National Schemes regarding Branch Lectures. Branches of the A.E.U. are fixing up as far in advance as October. Out of nine candidates at the next Municipal Election at Wallsend eight are students of the N.C.L.C. Durham College ends with a balance in hand.

*Division 10 (Scotland):* The reports submitted to Division 10's annual meeting show that while the number of classes had not increased during the year there had been a fairly substantial increase in the number of students. Despite the effect of the Mining Dispute on the contribution from Miners' Unions, most of the Colleges were in a good financial position. Edinburgh College maintains its records for the largest income in Scotland while Glasgow had the largest number of students. While a number of Day Schools are

being run, the number could be substantially larger. Lanarkshire held successful Day Schools at Larkhall and Carluke with A. Woodburn and D. J. Williams as the lecturers.

*Division 11 (Ireland):* No report.

*Division 12:* Under the management of Mrs. Skellington, Nottingham L.C. Secretary, many children were engaged in selling sachets advertising N.C.L.C. Classes, instead of taking part in Empire Day functions. The first Day School to be held at Lincoln was very successful. Comrade Jarvis carried through all the arrangements admirably. It is hoped to run another school in the city early in the autumn. Nottingham College is busy arranging for the week-end School on July 16th and 17th, when Maurice Dobb is to be the lecturer. Will all I.W.C.E.ers in the area please note the date?

#### DAY AND WEEK-END SCHOOLS.

*Altrincham,* July 23rd and 24th (E. Redfern, 1 Langdale Avenue, Reddish, Stockport).

*Nottingham,* July 16th and 17th (C. Brown, George V. Villas, Garden Lane, Sutton-in-Ashfield, Notts.).

*Aberdeen,* July 3rd (W. Morrison, 323 Holburn Street, Aberdeen).

*Aberdeen,* August 7th (W. Morrison, 323 Holburn Street, Aberdeen).

*Slaitthwaite,* July 10th (J. W. Kennedy, Ing Head, Linthwaite, Huddersfield).

*Mitcham,* July 17th (G. Phippen, 11a Penywern Road, Earl's Court, London, S.W.5).

*Dundee,* July 3rd (D. J. Williams, c/o Mitchell, 35 Forth Street, Dunfermline).

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#### PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

*Letters of an Individualist,* by Ernest Benn (Benn, 3/6).

*Towards Industrial Peace* (King, 6/-).

*Raid on Arcos, Ltd. and the Trade Delegation of U.S.S.R.* (Ang.-Russ. Parly. Comm., 3d.).

*West Africa,* by Elinor Burns (Lab. Res. Dept., 6d. and 1/-).

*Zement,* von F. Gladkov (Verlag fur Literatur, Vienna).

*Soviet Union Year Book, 1927* (Allen & Unwin, 7/6).

*Bolshevism, Fascism and Democracy,* by F. Nitti (Allen & Unwin, 7/6).



# The PLEBS Bookshelf



I HAVE been reading two biographies, both of them "best sellers" at the moment: Emil Ludwig's *Napoleon*, and Liam O'Flaherty's *Life of Tim Healy*. Each of them has a special interest for Plebs. Ludwig's book is translated—and really perfectly translated—by Eden and Cedar Paul; and Liam O'Flaherty, whose tales and sketches of Irish life in the *Manchester Guardian* will be well-known to many Plebs, was at one time more or less actively associated with the Labour College movement in Liverpool. The fact that we have a kind of "family interest" in books of this quality enables us to smile quietly at those of our W.E.A. friends who deprecate the lack of general culture which characterises the I.W.C.E. movement.

The two books have one other point in common which I will refer to in a moment. In the meantime their differences are rather more noticeable. Ludwig's is a big volume of 700 closely-printed pages, packed with detail about the doings, sayings, thoughts and ambitions of one man. There is little or no "background." You are given no idea of the social forces which found their expression in Napoleon's rise—and fall. What you do get is a marvellously vivid story of the events of one man's life—and what a life!—and of their reaction on the character of the man himself. The book is literally biography, not history.

But let not disbelievers in the Great Man Theory of History hastily set it down therefore as of no account. There are periods in history—usually revolutionary periods—when one of the most important of historical factors is the character of a single individual. [N.B. According to trustworthy report, Herr Ludwig is going to write a book about one Lenin.] The character of Napoleon Buonaparte was a factor which affected European history, just as the character of the leader of the Russian Revolution was a factor which affected European history a century later. That very vanity

which led Napoleon, a "self-made" adventurer, to deck himself in crown and purple and all the trappings of imperial state, to marry himself and his family with blood royal and to attempt to found a dynasty, was the very quality which gave "the divine right of kings" its deathblow—by making it ridiculous.

Herr Ludwig makes no attempt to sum up the Corsican in a phrase. He—like Liam O'Flaherty—is too great an artist to be content with simple labels like "hero" and "villain," or to regard conventional standards of right and wrong as ultimate and absolute laws. His book is a triumph of *objective* writing, in which the author never obtrudes himself for a moment; but in which his subject is presented, without comment, "in the round"—good side and bad side, heroism and littleness. And it is a *book*, a work of art in itself, not a compilation complete with bibliography and footnotes. The sincerest compliment I can pay it is that it made me keen to read, or re-read, everything about Napoleon I could put my hands on—the chapter in Wells' *Outline*; the Home University volume by H. A. L. Fisher (which doesn't tell one much about Napoleon, but *does* throw a blinding light on the mind and outlook of a British bourgeois-pedagogue-prig); and the last part of Hardy's *Dynasts*. And if any Pleb will tell me of any other worth-while glimpses of Napoleon in literature (as distinct from orthodox British textbooks) I shall be heartily grateful.

Liam O'Flaherty's *Tim Healy* is as different, in style and method of treatment, from Ludwig's book as two biographies well could be. In the first place, O'Flaherty is acutely interested in the social background—despite the protestations in his preface that he is simply an artist, interested in individuals. In the second place, he makes no attempt to keep himself out of his book; but, on the contrary, steps in on every page with highly personal (and brilliantly effective) comments on and criticisms of his characters. No impartiality here! One

result of this is that whereas it is impossible to quote a single passage from *Napoleon*—since the book is one unbroken narrative, getting its effects by the sheer onward sweep of events vividly described—there is scarcely a page of *Tim Healy* which does not contain a sentence or a paragraph crying aloud for quotation. Take this, for instance, about Bantry, Healy's native town, both as illustrating O'Flaherty's attitude towards the social and historical background and his ability to comment on it forcefully and wittily:—

Ireland was united definitely with the British Empire and Bantry became a fishing village, instead of the important merchant town which it had been previous to the bestowal upon it of this Imperial favour. . . . The English, finding that the port of London was a much better port than the port of Bantry, indeed better than any Irish port, closed all these Irish ports in the interests of progress. The inhabitants of Bantry became fishermen and peasants.

Or this about the Great Famine:—

Unless we beat our breasts and admit that Divine Providence, aiding the British Empire. . . sent us the great famine in punishment for our sins, it is very difficult for us to understand its origin. For the histories tell us that there was a surplus of food in the country at the time. They say food was exported in those years, so there must have been a surplus. For surely the English would not have received our export of corn while our grandfathers were dying of hunger by the roadside, unless they knew they were fulfilling the aims of a Higher Power.

You will have begun to perceive that O'Flaherty is not so much a biographer as a pamphleteer. He is a raging, tearing pamphleteer—against Imperialism, landlordism, capitalism, commercial-patriotism, religion, priestcraft, whisky and politicians. . . Two of Tim Healy's uncles, "representing the rising Irish middle class," carried on an agitation for "a constitutional national political party" in the *Nation* newspaper. A "patriotic" historian, O'Flaherty tells us, writes of them thus:—"To these two brothers Ireland owes it that the lamp of national faith and hope was held aloft through the long and apparently endless night of eviction, hunger, emigration,

triumphant tyranny and political perfidy." O'Flaherty's comment is:—

What the two brothers were really trying to hold aloft was the circulation of their newspaper and the demand of the rising Irish Catholic middle class to be allowed to legislate for the Irish peasants and workmen. A Marxist and a wit! Praise be to Allah! Here are one or two of his sidelights on political (and economic) movements in Ireland:—

In the countries where the feudal system still prevailed, like Ireland and Russia, [he is writing of the last quarter of the 19th century] the class that wanted to make machines, manufacture articles and sell them to their neighbours formed themselves into political associations in order to overthrow feudalism. Nihilism and Liberalism developed in Russia. In Ireland Fenianism and the Home Rule movement came into being. . . . At



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this point it would be well to state once more the real nature of this Irish struggle for independence and the real nature of the English opposition to it. We find politicians of that period talking of the 'national pride of the Gaelic race.' Other politicians talked of the Irish as 'marching through rapine to the dismemberment of the Empire.' But the child of average intelligence a thousand years hence will clearly see that in the background was heard the whirring of machines, and that the human beings who talked, struggled and gesticulated in the foreground were quarrelling over the possession of these machines. 'The English had machines,' the child will tell its master, 'and the Irish wanted to get machines. That was what it was, teacher. . . .'

O'Flaherty tells the story of the Dublin strike of 1912-13. Later he tells how Wm. Martin Murphy's paper, the *Independent*, went on, day after day, screaming for the execution of Connolly. Then he remarks:—

This newspaper, the *Irish Independent*, is now talking arrogantly of a Greater Gaelic State, on the plan of Mussolini. Not three golden balls, but all the golden balls of the Medicis would be needed to adorn such a pawnshop.

I said above that these two books, Ludwig's and O'Flaherty's, had another feature in common. It is this: in both of them the "villain" (no, "dirty cad") of the story is the British Ruling Class. In the case of Napoleon, that class sent a man whom they wanted to kill, but dared not kill, to an island well-known to be fatal to persons suffering from the disease Napoleon suffered from. In the story which forms the most exciting part of O'Flaherty's book—the story of Parnell—that same class, having tried to "down" an inextinguishable enemy by every conceivable means, open and secret, at last conspired with his own followers to trap him by means of a woman, and to overwhelm him with a great wave of pious horror. These English gentlemen!!

Perhaps I ought to mention before I finish that here and there in O'Flaherty's book a politician named Tim Healy gets a mention.

J. F. H.



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